The Scottish

Sabbath School Teachers' Book

Grade I.

THE SCOTTISH
SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHERS' BOOK

GRADE I

Belle Livingston.
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The Scottish SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHERS' BOOK

GRADE I

PREPARED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
BY MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

THIS book has been prepared by authority of the General Assembly as an aid to teachers in those Sabbath Schools in which the General Assembly's Scheme of Lessons is followed. That scheme, proposed by the Committee on Sabbath Schools and approved by the General Assembly of 1889, contains a four years' course of lessons. The course embraces forty lessons on the Old Testament; a first series of forty lessons on the Life, Teaching, and Works of our Lord; a second series of forty lessons on the same subject; and forty lessons on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. These lessons were to be adapted to three Grades—the first Grade consisting of scholars from seven to ten; the second, of scholars from ten to fourteen; and the third, of scholars above fourteen years of age.

The lessons for Grade I.—contained in this book—were assigned to various writers as follows:—

OLD TESTAMENT—

Lessons I.–XX., Rev. JAMES DODDS, D.D., Corstorphine.
Lessons XXI.–XL., Rev. THOMAS NICOL, B.D., Edinburgh.

LIFE OF OUR LORD—

Lessons I.–XXXIV., Rev. JAMES ROBERTSON, D.D., Whittinghame.
Lessons XXXV.–XL. (Part I.) and I.–XVII. (Part II.), Rev. D. N. IMRIE, B.D., Edinburgh.
Lessons XVIII.–XL. (Part II.), Rev. THOMAS MARTIN, M.A., Lauder.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES—

Lessons I.–XXIII., Rev. A. IRVINE ROBERTSON, B.D., Clackmannan.

EPISTLES—

Lessons XXIV.–XL., Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D., Edinburgh.

It must be understood that the writers are not responsible for the selection of passages for lessons, the passages having been laid down for them in the scheme approved by the General Assembly of 1889.

The Lesson Helps contained in this book have been prepared with a view to children from seven to ten years of age. The writers have accordingly felt themselves limited in the treatment of their subjects by the consideration of what was most suitable to the requirements and the capacity of such children. Although in the preparation of this book the best available helps to the exposition and illustration of the lessons have been employed, it would have been obviously inappropriate to load it with learned references and notes, or to introduce questions beyond the experience and intelligence of the children addressed through its pages. The brief Introduction will explain more fully how the book is meant to be used; it will here suffice to say that it is not a commentary but a teachers' book, whose matter and arrangement are such as to help the teacher to explain clearly the passages prescribed, and to enforce with suitable illustrations the truths which they contain. The book is not meant to be read to the children in class; it is not intended to supersede study and preparation on the part of the teacher; it is meant to be a help and a guide—to quicken and stimulate and suggest.

It will be seen that while a general uniformity of treatment has been observed, the individuality of the writers has had free play. It is hoped that this has helped in some degree to impart variety and freshness to the pages of the book.

The Editor of this book has to explain that the work of Editorship was assigned in the first instance to the Rev. George Wilson of St. Michael's, Edinburgh. To the deep regret of all who were associated with him, Mr. Wilson felt compelled, in consequence of domestic affliction and a break-down in health, to lay down the Editorship while still on the threshold of its duties. In compliance with the request of the Sabbath School Committee the present Editor took up the work, and he has to thank the writers for supporting him so loyally in carrying it through. He has to express special obligations to the Assessor nominated by the Sabbath School Committee, Mr. J. M. Steele, Headmaster of the Church of Scotland Training College Practising School, Edinburgh, for valuable suggestions both as to the matter and the form of the lessons; to Mr. T. J. Wilson, S.S.C., Edinburgh, who read the proof-sheets and gave useful hints from the standpoint of an experienced Sabbath School Superintendent; and to Mr. J. Turnbull Smith, Convener of the General Assembly's Sabbath School Committee, who relieved him of much of the necessary correspondence, and was unwearied in his efforts to further the progress of the work.

It only remains to commend this effort to promote the religious education of the young within the Church of Scotland to the blessing of Him who said, 'Feed My lambs.'

THOMAS NICOL.

INTRODUCTION

The Lesson Helps contained in this book have been prepared with a view to children from seven to ten years of age. Although some of them seem almost directly spoken to the children, and although most of them contain questions and question-hints which might be used to gather up the gist of a narrative, and to keep up the interest of the class—the Lesson Helps are not directly addressed to the children in class. They are intended to guide and help the teacher in preparation. They are meant to reach the children through the medium of the teacher's mind and heart and voice. They group together the incidents of a Bible story and the truths of a Scripture subject in such a way that, with their help, the ordinary teacher should find it easy to present the lesson to the children in an interesting and instructive form. They are not meant to supersede study of the lesson on the part of the teacher, but rather to stimulate thought, and to suggest lines of exposition and spiritual application.

In employing these Lesson Helps to teach children from seven to ten years, it is of the utmost importance that teachers should have a just idea of the religious capabilities of that tender age. Parents and teachers are, it is to be feared, disposed to look upon children of that age more in the light of prospective than of actual Christians. But this is surely to forget their baptismal covenant, and to ignore the blessing of Him who said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of

such is the kingdom of heaven' (Mark x. 14). Sabbath School teaching often sets before it no higher aim than to store the childish mind with facts and principles whose influence, it is hoped, will be felt and will become really fruitful in more mature years—when conscience is more fully awake, when the heart is more susceptible of impression, when the mind has become more active and has fairly opened to the realities of life. That Sabbath School teaching should look to the future for its full harvest is only natural and right. But that it should direct its efforts merely or mainly to the future is to leave untouched a field which when properly cultivated will yield to the faithful teacher not a little interest and encouragement in the present. Sabbath School teaching falls short of its high purpose if it does not strive to make Christian truth and Christian influence felt even now upon the plastic soul of childhood, upon the opening intelligence of youth, upon the strange mysterious contacts of the childish heart with heaven, upon the earnest thoughts that float dim and undefined in the childish mind. The years to which these Lesson Helps are adapted are critical years in the formation of character and the creation of good dispositions. Children of this age are capable, through the working of conscience within them, of the sense of sin; they are subject, through the power of imagination, to conviction and fears as regards the world unseen; and they may know by experience what it is to receive and enjoy the forgiveness of sin. Above all, they are capable of being touched by the great love of God, and of being drawn to Christ, Who on earth took little children up in His arms and blessed them. Trust, love, reverence are the earliest emotions in the childish heart, and to make God and Christ the chief objects of these emotions in their early and impressible years, is the aim of all true Christian instruction of the children. The Infinite appeals to the child's sense of wonder and reverence, and the goodness and love of God our

Father in heaven cannot fail to win the trust and love of young hearts. And it is the more gracious aspects of God's character that should be presented to the minds of children of this tender age. Love rather than fear should be the great motive power of their young lives. Corresponding to these feelings and to the knowledge which they early acquire of divine things, there are simple duties to be expected of the children. Obedience towards God, honour to parents, kindness towards one another, respect for those who are over them, and reverence towards age, not to speak of diligence, truthfulness, and honesty, are duties all within reach of young children. The duty of prayer, too, is one to which children may be early called, and they should be encouraged to bring their everyday concerns to God in prayer, and to express themselves naturally and simply concerning them. The circle of duty to a child from seven to ten may not be large, but the centre of it will always be the endeavour to be well pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose love is one of the first truths the young heart will receive and embrace. From what has been said it will be clear that there is wide scope to the teacher even of the younger children in the Sabbath School to convey to their hearts impressions of spiritual things, and to lift their everyday life upward and Godward.

As regards the Sabbath School, the two great factors in conveying the impressions of which we have spoken are the personal influence of the teacher, and the Word of God in the teacher's hands. The personal influence of a devoted Christian teacher in sympathetic touch with a class of Sabbath scholars, and realising in due measure the possible issues of their intercourse together, cannot be over-estimated. The kindly manner and the winning persuasiveness of the earnest Sabbath School teacher must ever tell mightily for good upon the children both in and out of Sabbath School. But given the same qualifications

and the same gifts of personal influence, that teacher will accomplish better and more lasting results whose teaching is more fully and systematically Scriptural,—that is, who employs the Scripture lesson to touch the heart and to ply the conscience with the life-giving truth of God. If the illustration might be allowed, we should say that the sympathetic manner and the affectionate earnestness of the teacher are the gunpowder supplying the impelling force, while the Scripture lesson with its incident, its doctrine, its revelation of divine things is the shot which is calculated to take effect on the conscience and the heart. When we add that the Holy Spirit furnishes the Divine fire, our illustration is complete. If that comparison is just, then it is clear that the teacher will make only a transient impression who uses the points of the lesson merely as pegs on which to hang a number of pretty stories that convey no lesson relevant to the subject, or makes a few religious commonplaces do duty upon subjects of the most diverse character, or substitutes for a course of Scriptural instruction well-meant general exhortations to Christian faith and practice. We believe that those who are our most satisfactory young communicants and the most faithful and consistent members of our churches are, as a general rule, those whose hearts have been best sown in their early years, whether in the home or in the Sabbath School, with the seed of Scripture truth. It is, therefore,—save in exceptional cases, when the children are very young or very unruly,—a great abuse of the short time allowed for the Scripture lesson, when any teacher occupies part of it in reading to the class from a story-book, or in telling stories, however interesting, which have no bearing at all upon the Scripture lesson for the day. It is the truth of God in its many forms—history, parable, prophecy, exhortation, promise, precept—which is the incorruptible seed of which men are born again through the Spirit of God.

The scheme of lessons for which this book of Lesson Helps has been prepared contains a continuous course of Scripture instruction from Genesis to Revelation. It follows the flow of the sacred history, covering the ground which is usually deemed most suitable for Sabbath School teaching; and when, as in the Old Testament lessons, there are considerable breaks between the passages, an effort has been made to maintain the historic continuity by filling in the needful links in the introduction to the lesson. It is hoped that there will also be seen, underneath the flow of the Scripture history as set forth in the Lesson Helps, the Divine plan, as it is gradually unfolded, of man's redemption and renewal, which binds the books of the Bible into one great and wonderful whole.

As has been already hinted, this book has been provided to aid the teacher in preparation. Whilst exposition and illustration and practical lessons will prove serviceable as they are given, they may prove of more service still by suggesting to teachers other lines of exposition and illustration and application. They can only do so, however, when the passage is carefully studied along with the Lesson Helps. And it cannot be too earnestly enforced as a general principle that only through preparation can the teacher give variety and freshness and interest and point to the Scripture lesson week by week. Children are fond of what is new and fresh; none will detect sooner whether a teacher has anything fresh to say. Without preparation the stock of ideas which the teacher has to work with is soon exhausted, and the class becomes wearied of the repetition of the old commonplaces, loses interest, and perhaps gets unmanageable and out of hand. The prepared teacher, on the other hand, knows before appearing in the presence of the class what are the most interesting and profitable points to seize, has considered how those are best to be presented and applied, and has searched out parallels from

Scripture, analogies from nature, or illustrations from human experience to make the points effective and telling. It is well for the teacher to have the lesson for the Sabbath in mind throughout the preceding week. The subject will then have time to arrange itself in the teacher's mind, and illustrations will be picked up in the course of reading, or of walking, or of common work. It need only be added that teachers should endeavour to assimilate the truths and doctrines of the lesson, to master them and make them quite their own, and then with the weight and freshness of their own realisation of them, bring them to bear upon the class. No doubt all this involves labour, but the labour spent on such preparation will be found to be rewarding; it will be returned in the attention of the class, in a good impression made upon the children's hearts, and in the sense of satisfaction with work honestly done.

When a teacher thus prepared and in hearty touch with the children is face to face with a class, there will be little difficulty in making the lesson interesting and effective. With the young children of this Grade, abstract and doctrinal terms should be avoided, and the lesson conveyed in simple, clear, concrete, and as far as possible pictorial words. To tell the story simply, with questions thrown in to secure attention from the children, is perhaps as impressive and serviceable a method as any. We have spoken of illustrations, and no better or more effective illustrations can be found than those supplied by Scripture history and biography themselves. As a rule, the teacher will find more in the lessons of this book than can possibly be taught to young children in the time allowed; and it will not be wise to attempt to press home upon the children more than one, or at most two, of the practical lessons or applications deducible from the subject. As more than one practical lesson is usually given, the teacher may choose the one most suitable in the circumstances, and lead

up to it with the aid of the materials provided in the Lesson Helps. But, indeed, oftentimes the telling of the story, well pictured out and pointed with good illustrations, is the best application that can be made of the lesson. There can be nothing better in the teaching of a Scripture lesson—to reiterate what has already been urged—than to let God's Word speak as directly and as clearly to the children's hearts as possible, for He has given to the Sabbath School teacher, as to the minister and the missionary, the encouraging promise, 'My word . . . shall not return unto Me void' (Isa. lv. 11).

We have spoken of the ideal teacher as one who works, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, with diligence and prayer, for present impression upon the members of a class. It is not always given even to the most devoted teachers to see in their scholars the results they have so anxiously longed for and prayed for. More often the teacher is discouraged by the smallness of the present and immediate result. The seed of God's truth may lie long in the furrow, to all appearance dead and forgotten, within young hearts. But where it really has found lodgment and abides as a living germ, where it has been sown in faith and watered with earnest prayers, it is upon it that God's many preachers—affliction, disappointment, pain, every event of life, as well as the preacher in the pulpit—take hold and work with a view to a saving result. 'Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receive the early and latter rain.' 'Though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed, he shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him' (Jas. v. 7; Ps. cxxvi. 6, Revised Version).

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LESSONS

FROM

THE OLD TESTAMENT

I.—THE CREATION

Gen. i., ii. 1-3

I. **The Beginning** (i. 1, 2).—This lesson tells us how all things began to be. There was a time when none of the things we see around us had been made, when there was no earth, or sun, or moon, or stars. Man could not have lived then, for there was no home for him. God had made the angels, who are spirits, and do not need an earthly home, but He had not made man, who does. Then, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. To create is to make out of nothing, and God alone can do that. When we look about us we see many things that man has made, but he could not have made any of them out of nothing. The mason needs stone of which to make houses, and the carpenter needs wood to make chairs and tables, but God did not need anything of which to make the world. He created all things, of which man makes what he desires for shelter and comfort. Man cannot create anything, not the smallest atom of what we call matter, but by using what God has created he can make very wonderful things. This book of Genesis was written by Moses, and God must have told Moses what He did in the beginning, for when He made the world there was no man to see what was done. The Bible is God's Book (2 Pet. i. 21).

'In the beginning' may mean very long before man was made. It may mean thousands of years before God made the world ready to be a home for Adam. In the beginning He created the heavens and the earth. We do not know for whom He first created them, but when He began to prepare the earth for man it was not at all like what it is now. The earth was 'without form, and void.' The world is now full of beauty and of life, but it was not beautiful then, and there was nothing living upon it; no trees could grow, no animals could exist, for it was all under water, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. It was a dark and desolate waste. But God was there, and He can change darkness into light and confusion into order and beauty. The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

II. **The Six Days** (vv. 3-31).—God could have made the world bright and beautiful in a moment. Just as He said, 'Let there be light, and there was light,' so He might have said, 'Let the world be made ready for man, and let man possess the world,' and His word would have been followed by fulfilment. But it pleased Him to take six days for this work, and to tell man that He had done so. All things God has made are called His creatures, because He created them. God has many creatures that are very different from each other, but we may regard them as of two kinds—**those that have life** and **those that are not living.** The **first creatures** God made during

the days of creation were **those that had no life**; then He made creatures **with lower forms of life**, then **higher forms**, and last of all He made **man**, and gave him dominion over all the others.

The work of **The First Day** (vv. 3-5) was **light.** God said, 'Let it be,' and it was. People used to think that all light came from the sun, and that there was something strange in light being created before the sun was appointed, but it has been discovered that the sun is a dark body, owing its light to the atmosphere surrounding it. Without light there can be no healthy life, and if darkness rested always on the world it would return to the state in which it was before light was created. 'God saw the light, that it was good.' 'There is none good but One; that is God,' and everything He made was good like Himself.

The work of **The Second Day** (vv. 6-8) was **the firmament**—the atmosphere surrounding the earth in which birds fly and clouds float, and also the region in which sun, moon, and stars are set.

On **The Third Day** (vv. 9-13) God made the **dry land**, with its products of **grass, herb**, and **tree**, the herbage that grows without man's care, the herb that requires to be sown or planted, and the tree that yields fruit,—all containing within themselves a power of reproducing their kinds, and each possessing its own character, so that 'men do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles.'

On **The Fourth Day** (vv. 14-19) the **sun, moon**, and **stars** were set in the firmament as lights or light-carriers. The word 'lights' (v. 14) is not the 'light' of the first day, but a term used of lamps or candlesticks. The sun, moon, and stars are not lights but light-bearers, and they are for signs, seasons, days, and years. The stars are signs to the sailor, or the land traveller, by which he guides his course; the moon is appointed for seasons (Ps. civ. 19); and the sun regulates the days and years.

On **The Fifth Day** (vv. 20-23) God made the **fishes** and the **birds.**

On **The Sixth Day** (vv. 24-31) He made **beasts** (what we now call wild animals, as lions, tigers, foxes, hares) and **cattle** (or what we call domestic animals, as cows, sheep, goats). On this day too He made **creeping things. The world as it left the hand of God was very beautiful.** It was now ready to be **a home for man.** The sun shone in the sky, the grass and the flowers carpeted the ground, the birds sang in the trees, and the beasts roamed and the cattle grazed in the plains, but none of these creatures knew or could know who had given them life. The highest of them were only brute beasts that had no understanding (Ps. xxxii. 9). They might be happy in their own way, but only as beasts are happy.

So God made a creature different from all the others (vv. 26-28). He said, '**Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth.**' Then God made man in His own image. He made his body of the dust of the ground, and that part of him was not like God, but He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and made him a living soul; and so man's soul is the part of him which was made in the likeness of God. Man's likeness to God consisted in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Col. iii. 10; Eph. iv. 24). Adam in Eden was not an ignorant savage. He did not know everything,

but all his knowledge was real and true. He could invent, reason, judge, and plan. He had no bias towards evil. He was free to serve God. He was 'made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour. All the creatures were put under him, and all things were made for his use' (Ps. viii. 6-8). Man was made to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever, and, not like the creatures God made before man, none of which could enjoy Him, because none of them had been made like Him, and so could not know Him nor understand that He was their Creator. God gave to Adam powers, sympathies, and affections which enabled him to believe in God, and to understand what was told him of His thoughts and purposes. His soul too enabled him to find enjoyment in all the works of God such as he never could have had if he had been, like beasts that perish, without a soul.

So with man's creation the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them—all, that is, contained in heaven and earth, called *a host* because of their vast variety and perfect order (Neh. ix. 6). At the end of each of the creative days we are told that the evening and the morning were the day. The Jews reckoned their days from evening to evening.

III. **The Seventh Day** (ii. 1-3).—On **The Seventh Day God rested.** He does not need to rest, for the Almighty Arm is never weary, but He rested to teach us that one day in seven is to be hallowed or set apart for rest and worship by man. He not only ceased from creating; 'He rested and was refreshed' (Exod. xxxi. 17), and the Sabbath was made for man that he might in body, mind, and soul 'be refreshed' (Exod. xxiii. 12). God's works reflected His glory, and in the goodness of them all He had satisfaction. Well may we say, **'Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created'** (Rev. iv. 11).

The Sabbath is as old as Creation, for 'God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it' (v. 3). Its sanctity is enforced in the fourth commandment, but it was established in Eden, and the word 'remember' shows it was no new law. God *blessed* it—attached a special blessing, which should rest on all who devoted it to his service. He *sanctified* it—gave it a special character, as a day consecrated to sacred purposes.

LESSONS

The **omnipotence** of God, shown by His calling all things into being; His **wisdom,** in adapting means to ends; His **goodness,** in providing for the wants of all His creatures; His **satisfaction in the goodness of His works;** and His **desire for man's continuance in holiness,** shown in the institution of the Sabbath.

II.—THE FALL

Gen. iii.

Introduction.—For a time Adam and Eve lived together in the garden which God had planted for them in Eden. He continued to be their Friend, and they had everything that was good for food, pleasant to the eyes or to be desired. They had been created holy, and holy beings are always happy. The world was their own, the flowers and fruits of Eden were theirs, the lower animals were subject to them, and if they had continued to obey God nothing could hurt or destroy them. But they had an enemy who might tempt though he could not touch them. He had been an angel, but was now a devil, for he had rebelled against God, had been cast out of heaven, and become the enemy of God and of everything good. He saw Adam and Eve in their beautiful home, and was determined if possible to make them rebels like himself and suffer because of sin. God had told Adam and Eve not to eat of a particular tree that grew in the garden. It was the only thing they were told not to do, and the devil knew that he could lead them into temptation and sin only by persuading them to eat of this tree.

I. **The Tempter** (v. 1).—He set to work very cunningly. The devil is a fallen angel, and angels have no bodies like men, they are spirits, and devils are evil spirits. We cannot see spirits (Luke xxiv. 39), and if the devil had come to Eden as a spirit he could not have been seen by Adam or Eve, but he can pretend to be what he is not (2 Cor. xi. 14), and he had the power of appearing under the form of a beast. The serpent in Eden was the most subtle, or clever, of all the beasts which God had made, and the devil chose to appear to Eve as a serpent. He cunningly chose a time when Adam was not with her, and when she was near the forbidden tree. We are told that Eve was deceived (2 Cor. xi. 3), and that Adam was not deceived (1 Tim. ii. 14). Eve sinned in believing what the serpent said; Adam sinned knowingly and willingly because he would not be separated from partnership with her even in sin. Eve probably knew less than Adam about the other creatures of God, and does not seem to have been surprised when the serpent spoke to her. He tried first to make her think God hard, unkind, and jealous of His creatures, and then to awake in her a wish to have what He had forbidden. This is the way he always tempts, and as we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. ii. 11) we should watch and pray against them.

II. **Eve's Temptation** (vv. 1-6).—Eve was in a beautiful garden with everything to make obedience easy, and very different from the wilderness where the devil tempted Jesus, the second Adam, faint and hungry. The serpent asked if it was true that God had said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden.' He often uses words of God to gain his wicked ends, but he never quotes them correctly. He twists them and makes them look different from their real meaning. God had said, 'Eat of every tree but one'; His words are full of invitation and liberty, but Satan's twist gives another meaning, and makes them sound of restriction and bondage. Eve replies rightly that Adam and she might eat of the fruit of every tree except one, but wrongly that God had said

of that one, 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.' God had said nothing about touching, though it was safe not to touch, and he had said not '*lest* ye die,' but ye shall *surely* die. Eve has fallen into the snare, and her words show it. She has followed the devil's example and changed God's words. When the devil tempted Jesus and twisted Scripture to Him, Jesus gave back God's words as God had spoken them, and the fiery darts of the devil could not stand before the sword of the spirit, 'which is the word of God.' Having thus moved her from the Word of God, the devil became more daring. He spoke wicked words about God, telling Eve that He had forbidden Adam and her to eat the fruit of the tree because He knew that if they ate they should become like Himself, and have power and happiness in and from themselves without Him, and know good and evil for themselves without His instruction. As yet they knew nothing of evil, for they themselves were holy, and everything in Eden was very good. Eve did not resist the devil. God's word to us now is: **'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'** (Jas. iv. 7). She kept looking at the tree. She should have gone away from it, for through the eyes temptation often makes its way to the heart (Joshua vii. 21). As she looked, the desire to eat grew strong. The tree was pleasant to the eyes, and the lust of the eyes awoke the lust of the flesh, she saw that it was good for food, and then the devil's lies stirred the pride of life, she believed it was a tree to be desired to make her wise, and she took of the fruit and ate (1 John ii. 16). This is the way in which the devil works, leading on from step to step in sin those who listen to him. He cannot force any one to do wrong. Eve was tempted, but the devil can do no more than tempt. **The temptation came from Satan, but the sin was her own.**

III. **Adam's Temptation** (v. 6).—Eve was tempted by the devil, but Adam's tempter was Eve. Sometimes we are tempted to sin by people whom we love. Jacob's mother led him into sin, Job's wife tried to make him curse God, and Peter tempted Jesus to turn aside from the cross. We should all remember that our first duty is to God (Eccles. xii. 13), and that we must always obey Him rather than man. When Eve returned to Adam she told him what she had done. He had then to choose between his duty to obey God and the desire he felt to please Eve. We should try to please others by being kind and helpful to them, but never by doing wrong. Adam loved Eve very much. She was the only human being besides himself in the world, she was his wife, 'bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.' It was natural that he should desire to please her, but his duty was clear (Luke xiv. 26). We do not read that the serpent spoke to Adam. He knew that Eve was now his servant and would do His work better than he could himself, so he cunningly left her to tempt her husband. Adam was not deceived. He knew that the devil's words were lies, but he set his wife's desire before God's command. 'She gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat.'

IV. **Knowledge of Evil** (vv. 7-24).—Then their eyes were opened. The pleasures of sin are for a season (Heb. xi. 25). They knew that they were naked, that they were not in a state to meet God. So they tried to hide their knowledge of evil by sewing fig leaves together and making aprons. But when in the cool of the day the voice of God was heard, the uselessness of their aprons was felt, and they tried to hide among the trees. They had never before

feared to meet God, but they were sinners now, and shame and terror made them flee.

God first spoke to Adam. He called, 'Adam, where art thou?' And the voice was irresistible. Adam must give account of himself unto God, and is condemned out of his own mouth. The knowledge of his nakedness must have come from disobedience. 'Hast thou eaten?' Adam's answer showed how far he had fallen. 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.' He blames God for his disobedience. If God had not given him Eve, Eve would not have tempted him and he would not have fallen. This is ever the way. Every one and everything but self is to blame till true conviction comes, and then the cry is, '*I* have sinned.'

God next spoke to Eve. He said, 'What is this that thou hast done?' An awful question still receiving answer. Her sin had brought death into the world and opened hell for men. She too blames another. 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.'

After that **God turned to the serpent.** He summoned him to hear his doom in the presence of his victims, and pronounced a curse upon him, telling him that He would put enmity between him and the woman and her seed, and that while he should bruise the heel of her seed, her seed should bruise his head. Thus in wrath God remembered mercy (Hab. iii. 2). **It was wondrous mercy to allow Adam to hear what He said to the serpent before he listened to his own sentence.** God blamed the devil for man's fall, 'because thou hast done this,' and sentenced him to be bruised under the feet of the woman's seed. Here we have the first promise of a Redeemer—repeated again and again by God, and made ever clearer till we have it at last fulfilled in Jesus Christ. **He is the seed of the woman.** The serpent bruised His heel when wicked men nailed Him to the cross: but Jesus bruised his head and broke his power when by dying He won our peace and salvation (Col. ii. 15; 1 John iii. 8).

But **Adam and Eve were also guilty,** and **they too must suffer.** Upon **Adam** is laid the necessity of toil, of earning his bread in the sweat of his face from ground cursed and bringing forth thorns and thistles to make his work hard, and of returning through death to dust, such as that from which his body had been formed. Upon **Eve** is laid a sore burden of suffering and sorrow and of submission to the husband whom she had led into sin. **The cherubim with flaming sword now barred the way to Paradise, but He who set them at the east of Eden opened a safer, better, and more blessed way to the tree of life** (John xiv. 6; Heb. x. 20).

LESSONS

1. Do not question the truth of God's Word. God means what He says. The devil turns Scripture from its true meaning, and leads men to think God is not so strict as the Bible represents Him (2 Pet. iii. 16). 'Yea, hath God said?' was his address to Eve, and he often tempts us to give another meaning than the true one to God's Word.

2. Do not question that sin will be punished. 'Ye shall not surely die' was a falsehood of the devil, who still labours to persuade us that somehow or other our wrongdoing will not be punished. Beware of flattery.

3. Through listening to flattery Eve was ruined. 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' To know evil is to be evil, and evil cannot be undone.

III.—CAIN AND ABEL

Gen. iv. 1-16

Introduction.—Adam, who was created in the image of God, begat children in his own likeness. Eve became the mother of two sons. When the first was born—the first baby ever born—she named him Cain ('possession'), happy in her boy and regarding him as 'gotten from the Lord.' Perhaps she thought he was the seed to bruise the serpent's head. Her second son she called Abel ('vanity' or 'vapour'), because, it may be, she had found that Cain did not make her so happy as she had hoped. Adam was now the head of a family, and had to labour for his own and their support. He had been driven from the garden, and his work was no longer to 'dress and keep' the ground, but to dig and sow and reap in the sweat of his face, that he and his household might eat bread. When the boys grew up they too had to work. Cain chose to be a tiller of the ground, and Abel to be a keeper of sheep.

[It is right that boys and men should work. It was a merciful God who sentenced man to labour, for though too much work brings sorrow, idleness brings much more. It is through labour that we learn to enjoy leisure, and it is by work that all our bodily wants and comforts are supplied. Bad as many people are, the world would be a more wicked world by far if no one needed or was willing to work.]

But man must worship as well as work (Matt. iv. 4), and for this he must have set times. From the beginning he had the Sabbath, and the words '*in process of time*' (v. 3), or 'at the end of days,' probably mean at the end of the working days—on the Sabbath. At some appointed time the brothers Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. All we have comes from God, and God desires that we should remember this, and give back to Him a portion of what He has bestowed. The word 'brought' shows that the first family had a place of worship—perhaps on the east of Eden, where were the cherubim and the flaming sword.

I. **The two Offerings** (vv. 2-4).—No doubt God had made known the kind of offering He desired, and the spirit in which it should be offered. In making coats of skin for Adam and Eve, He had taught that deliverance from sin could be obtained only through sacrifice of life, and in the offerings He had no doubt directed that this should be set forth. He had shown, too, that they must be brought to Him in faith. Cain brought an offering that did not show he believed in God's promise of redemption. It was not the kind of offering which God had commanded. He was proud of himself and of the work of his hands, and thought his best gift would be, not what God asked, but what he had produced by his labour.

> 'Not the labours of my hands
> Can fulfil Thy law's demands.'

The ground was cursed for man's sake, and the fruit of that which was cursed could not be pleasing as an offering to God. Abel's offering was of another kind. He brought of the firstlings of the flock and of the fat

thereof—the first-born, without blemish, whose blood was an emblem of the blood which 'cleanseth from all sin.'

II. **The Reception** (vv. 4-7).—The brothers and their offerings were differently received by God. He looketh not on the outward appearance only, but on the heart, and He had respect unto Abel and to his offering; He was pleased with it and showed His pleasure by visible sign (Heb. xi. 4), perhaps by consuming Abel's sacrifice with fire; but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. Instead of producing sorrow and amendment, his rejection aroused anger against God and his brother. His countenance fell with anger and jealousy. The feelings and the character reflect themselves in the countenance (Acts vi. 15). God mercifully reasoned with him, pointing out his sin and danger and the way of escape: 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?'—literally, '*shall there not be lifting up?*' Cain's countenance had fallen, through disappointment and anger, but the fault was his own; he might yet find acceptance, and then his lifted-up face would express the gladness of his heart. 'And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.' Sin is represented as a beast lying in wait at the door of the soul to make a prey of Cain (1 Pet. v. 8). 'And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.' This may mean that sin desired to have Cain, but that Cain should withstand his temptations; or, preferably, 'his' may refer to Abel, in which case God assures Cain that if he will be obedient the desire of Abel shall be towards him, and he need not fear to lose the pre-eminence of birth through the preference now shown to his younger brother.

III. **The first Death** (vv. 8-10).—Cain was of that wicked one and slew his brother. This is the first death. The first dead body of human being on which Adam and Eve ever looked was that of their son slain by his brother. God's question to Eve (Gen. iii. 13), 'What is this that thou hast done?' had here a terrible answer. The two were in the field, and Cain talked with Abel his brother. He talked loudly and angrily, for he was envious and jealous of Abel because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous; envy led to hatred, and hatred to murder. Abel's death was better than Cain's life. Early death is not always evil. God saw the murder and called Cain to account. He gave him an opportunity to confess, but Cain was stubborn and rebellious. To God's question, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' he gave the defiant false reply, 'I know not: am I my brother's keeper?' God told him that the voice of his brother's blood cried to him from the ground. Murder is a sin that utters a voice to heaven for vengeance. Blood may be covered from sight, but the voice is not thereby silenced. The blood of Abel cried for vengeance, but the blood of Jesus speaketh better things—cries for pardon (Heb. xii. 24).

IV. **The Punishment** (vv. 11-15).—Cain was not put to death, which was afterwards fixed as the punishment of murder (ix. 6), but he was to be cursed from the earth—cursed away from the land—banished from the place where his father, mother, and brethren had their dwelling. That land would not yield him its fruits, and he should be a fugitive and vagabond in the earth.

Cain thinks only of the punishment; he is not penitent for the sin.

Fear of punishment is not repentance. He became a wanderer. The murderer is a fugitive and vagabond. Every man's hand is against him, and like Cain he feels himself an outcast. God manifested His presence in some way still to Adam and his family, and Cain felt he should lose that. Cain, like his father, blames God for his own act. God gave Cain a pledge that he should not be slain. He set a mark or sign upon him; what the sign was we cannot tell. Every one who departs from the presence of the Lord is a wanderer (Ps. cxix. 176).

LESSONS

1. God expects offerings, and we should bring to Him what He asks, not what we please.

2. All we bring to God or do for Him must be the fruit of faith. This makes the difference between acceptable and unacceptable service (Heb. xi. 4).

3. Brothers should not harbour grudges against one another (Gen. xlv. 24; Ps. cxxxiii. 1).

IV.—THE FLOOD

Gen. vi., vii., viii.

Introduction.—Last lesson showed how the first scattering of men was caused. Cain went out from the home of his father, founded a race, and built a city. He carried with him to the new settlement energy, industry, and talent. His sons betook themselves to work of various kinds (iv. 20, 21). They did not fear God, and they tried to prosper and be happy without Him. [It is right to be diligent, and it is good to be clever, but strength and skill must be regarded and used as gifts of God, or they will not bring lasting prosperity. Some people think that education without religion will raise a nation, but it never has done so and never will.] Men soon turned their industry and arts to evil purposes, gave way to riot and lust, and by sin brought upon themselves and others the judgment of the flood.

I. **The Wickedness of Men** (vi. 1-7).—While Cain was settling in Nod, a son was born to Adam and Eve, whom they named Seth. They seem to have been led by their great sorrow in connection with Cain and Abel to walk more closely with God. Seth was carefully trained, and taught his children to fear God and to call upon His name (iv. 26). For a time they maintained godly lives, but at last they were overcome of evil. As men multiplied, the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth came into contact and began to have transactions with each other. Those who feared God married into the families of those who feared Him not. The result was bad. The good fell into the ways of the evil, and wickedness and sin became fearfully common. [We should choose our companions not because of their good looks or their cleverness, but because of their character. It is possible to fear God though wickedness abounds, but it is not possible if we make wicked people our companions and friends.] Wickedness became so terrible that God at length destroyed the world by a flood.

II. **Noah and the Ark** (vv. 8-22).—Before doing so, however, He gave warning of His intention, and allowed a space of one hundred and twenty years for repentance. He chose Noah to be His 'preacher of righteousness,' and bade him prepare an ark 'to the saving of his house.' Noah was the tenth in descent from Adam. 'He was a just man, perfect in his generation, and he walked with God.' He was the son of a godly father (v. 29). The command was given him to build an ark or vessel of gopher or cypress wood, large enough to contain himself, his wife, his three sons and their wives, and living creatures of all kinds, as well as supplies of food while the flood was upon the earth. The ark was not a ship, but rather an enormous box or chest. It had no mast, sail, or rudder, for it was meant only to float on the waters, not to sail over them. 'Moved with fear' (Heb. xi. 7), Noah obeyed God, and warned mankind of the flood for one hundred and twenty years, while the ark was being built.

III. **The Flood** (vii., viii. 1-14).—How sad to think that his warnings were all in vain! Not one believed in the flood, save his own family, till it

came. [The same is true of many who think there is no danger in sin and do not give heed to calls to repentance still.] At the end of one hundred and twenty years Noah and his house entered into the ark, and God shut him in. Then the flood came. It was the greatest judgment God has ever sent upon men, and it is not wonderful that all nations have some tradition about it. For forty days the rain poured down from heaven, and the fountains and lakes, rivers and seas, were swollen, till trees and hills were covered, and Noah and his family, and the living creatures that were with them in the ark, escaped an awful death.

Noah was shut in; he could not see around him, for the window was in the top of the ark. He did not know whether the waters were rising or abating, and at the end of forty days he sent forth a raven from the window to discover if the earth was yet dry. The raven feeds on carrion, and Noah knew that if it did not return, it would be because it had discovered food. It has been thought that it found carcases floating, on which it alighted and fed, returning from time to time and resting on the outside of the ark, but not entering into it. Seven days after, Noah sent forth a dove, which returned to the ark weary with flight, having found no place on which to alight. Again, seven days afterwards, he sent out the dove, which came back in the evening with an olive leaf—'pluckt off,' and therefore not found floating or stranded on the mountain, so he knew that the waters were abating. A third time, seven days after, he sent out the dove, which returned no more; and then he 'removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.' God had sent a wind over the earth, the waters abated, and the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat.

IV. **The Sacrifice and Covenant** (vv. 15-22).—Noah went out of the ark and offered a sacrifice to God. He thereby acknowledged that he and his family had been saved through the mercy of God, and that they as sinners needed God's forgiveness. Noah in his sacrifice declared his faith in God and thanked Him for his preservation. God was pleased with the sacrifice, and made a covenant with Noah. **A covenant** is an agreement between two parties. Where, as in the covenant between God and man, one is infinitely superior to the other, a covenant is a promise. God was pleased with the sacrifice, and gave a gracious promise that man should never again be destroyed by a flood, and that thenceforth seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, should never cease. This promise God has kept. Sometimes there have been unfavourable seedtimes and scanty harvests in parts of the world, but never over all the earth. Sometimes there have been cold summers and trying winters, but never has it happened that a year has come and gone without fulfilment of God's promise. [The year of the flood was one in which there could be no distinction of seasons. While water covered the earth there was only winter and darkness, but this condition is never to return. Our lives depend upon the regular succession of the seasons with their accompaniments of cold, heat, showers, sunshine, frosts, and dew. Sometimes in particular districts there is violent rain, and rivers overflow their banks, and fields and towns are flooded, but the earth has only once been destroyed by water.] God repeated to Noah the blessing given to

man at creation (ix. 1). Nature was made subject to him, every moving thing was given to him for food, but cruelty was forbidden. The murderer was to be punished with death (ix. 6). The covenant with Noah is repeatedly referred to (Ps. lxv.; Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21-25). Isaiah (Isa. liv. 9) uses it to illustrate God's redeeming mercy, and Ezekiel (i. 28) and John (Rev. iv. 3) use the rainbow, the token of the covenant, to set forth God's readiness to deal forth mercy. What a beautiful sign is a many-coloured rainbow! And what a tale it has to tell of judgment and mercy! But whenever He stretches out the arch over the clouds, God remembers His covenant with Noah, and when we see it we remember God's promise, and think of His mercy and love (ix. 13-17).

LESSONS

1. The ark built by Noah is an emblem of the salvation offered us by Christ. We need such a refuge from the punishment which must follow sin, and, if we remain outside in disobedience and unbelief, we shall perish as surely as the ungodly in the days of Noah. In Christ—that is, believing in Him and following Him—there is perfect safety.

2. God's love is seen in the rainbow; when we look upon it let us remember His goodness and faithfulness.

3. The thicker the cloud the brighter the bow, and the heavier the trials the more blessed the consolations.

V.—ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Gen. xxii. 1-19

Introduction.—Some hundreds of years had passed since the Flood. Men had again multiplied upon the earth, and, since the confusion of tongues at Babel, had been spreading themselves over different countries. Many of them had forgotten God and were worshipping idols. Among those who had settled at Ur of the Chaldees, somewhere near the Persian Gulf, was a family of whom the father was Terah. He had three sons—Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abram was not the eldest son, though he is named first, and his father was probably one hundred and thirty years old when he was born. Abram was brought up among idolaters. His father not only worshipped false gods (Joshua xxiv. 2), but was, according to Jewish tradition, a maker of idols. Abram was married to Sarai when God called him to leave country, kindred, and his father's house, and go to a land which He would show him. He obeyed God, and took with him his old father, his wife, and Lot his nephew, and they all lived together at Haran, 'the city of Nahor,' in Padanaram, until the death of Terah. Then God called Abram to leave Haran, and promised that He would lead him to a land which his children should possess, would make of him a great nation, and make him a blessing to the world. Abram obeyed God and went forth, not knowing whither he went, and God greatly prospered him. But he had come to be an old man, and Sarai also was old, and one part of God's promise had not been fulfilled. He had promised to bless him in his seed or children, but no child had yet been born. At last he and Sarai were made happy by the birth of Isaac. God changed their names to Abraham and Sarah, by which He signified that they would be great and have many descendants. Isaac had grown up to be a man when a stranger command than any yet given Abraham came to him from God. It came when he was settled at Beersheba, living a godly life (Gen. xxi. 33), peaceful and prosperous. He had everything the world could supply to make him comfortable and happy. The promised son had been given, his neighbours were friendly, his home was pleasant, he had abundance of cattle, and the land was well watered and fertile. But 'after these things' God did tempt Abram.

I. **Faith tried** (vv. 1, 2).—The temptation came, as to Job, in a time of great prosperity. We are told (Jas. i. 13) that God does not tempt any man, but 'tempt,' like many other words, has two meanings, one good, the other evil, and it has different meanings in this lesson and in James's epistle. The devil tempts us to make us sin, but God tempts or proves us that we may know ourselves (Matt. xix. 21), and that others may know what faith enables His people to do. The manner in which God tempted Abraham was bidding him offer up his son Isaac as a burnt-offering. What God wished to show to us in Abraham was, his readiness to give up his own will and his own natural feelings when he was clear that God called him to do so; and He requires of us no less than He did of Abraham, that we should make His will ours in trustful, loving, and obedient faith. It was a very heavy trial that God laid upon Abraham, but it was for good

to himself and to others that it was sent. ['For the most part a man's spirit cannot be known to himself, unless his strength be proved not by word but by actual trial' (Augustine). Illustrate also by Peter (Matt. xxvi. 33, 40, 75; 1 Pet. i. 7).] He was told to take his son—his only son, whom he loved, for whom he had waited so long, and on whom rested the promises—and to offer him up as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, forty-five miles from Beersheba, where Solomon afterwards built the temple.

II. **Faith triumphant** (vv. 3-9).—Abraham did not murmur at God's command. He did not tell Sarah or Isaac or his servants what God had commanded, but rose early and quietly saddled his ass—the old Eastern saddle was a piece of cloth (Matt. xxi. 7)—clave wood into pieces suitable for burning on the altar, that everything might be ready, and then set out with Isaac and two servants. On the third day Moriah was in sight. In many countries distances are reckoned by the hour; an hour's journey consisting of the space a good walker can traverse in that time, varying according to the nature of the country. Reckoning by days' journeys still prevails in the East. In desert travelling no other measure is available.

When Moriah was seen Abraham bade his servants remain with the ass. They could not understand his proceedings, and might hinder him in his work of faith. His promise to return with Isaac proves that he considered God able to raise up his son from the dead (Heb. xi. 17-19).

Then the wood was bound upon Isaac (v. 6). Isaac was a type of Christ, who carried the wood—that is, the cross—for the sacrifice of Himself (John xix. 17). Isaac was probably about twenty-four years of age, and his faith, patience, and obedience are as wonderful as Abraham's. He might have resisted, but he was ready to do and to bear what his father willed. He was astonished at Abraham's preparations; everything made ready for a burnt-offering—fire and wood and a knife, but the most important thing of all seemingly absent! 'My father, where is the lamb?' How keenly this question must have put Abraham's faith to the test! ['I know not whether that word "My father" did not strike Abraham as deep as the knife of Abraham could strike his son' (Hall).] What a struggle must have passed in the patriarch's heart as he and Isaac went up the hill! But grace overcame nature. Abraham believed God, and showed his faith by his words and works. 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.' Abraham trusted God, and he desires Isaac to have the same trust. The only comfort for tried believers is trust.

On reaching Moriah Abraham bound Isaac, not to prevent him from escaping, but because animals offered in sacrifice were bound (Ps. cxviii. 27). Isaac became obedient unto death, and in this too was a type of Christ. He was strong, and as he could carry the wood he could have resisted his old father; but as Abraham submitted his will to God's, so Isaac's will was submitted to his father's. Then Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. God tried his faith to the uttermost, and proved that Abraham was ready to obey to the letter the command, 'Offer him for a burnt-offering,' so that the deed was as good as done.

III. **Faith rewarded** (vv. 10-19).—A call came to Abraham which stopped his hand and rejoiced his heart. He had believed that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead, but he was spared the agony of slaying his dear son.

The speaker was the Covenant Angel who is called *God* (v. 1)—no other than the Son of God who had commanded the sacrifice. The end for which God tempted Abraham was gained, and He who had sent the trial brought deliverance (1 Cor. x. 13; 2 Pet. ii. 9).

'Lay not thine hand upon the lad.' 'Lad' is a word applied to grown-up men as well as children (Gen. xli. 12; Exod. xxxiii. 11; 2 Sam. xviii. 29). 'Now I know that thou fearest God.' He knew before (xviii. 19), but now He can make it known by proof to men. It was proved that the follower of Jehovah was as ready as heathens to surrender his most precious possession to his God. And Abraham was taught that God did not desire, though He had a right to demand, such a costly sacrifice as a human life. Paul tells us Abraham was justified by faith (Rom. iv. 2, 3); and James (ii. 21) that he was justified by works. Both are right. As a sinner Abraham was justified by his faith; as a believer by his works, which faith produced. We are God's justified children when we both believe and obey.

Then Abraham looked behind him and saw that God unseen had prepared a way of escape. He had heard Isaac's question and Abraham's answer, and now the father's hope is fulfilled in a way he knew not of. The sacrifice to be offered is of God's providing. 'In the stead of his son.' As this ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac, so Christ was offered up instead of us. God spared Isaac but spared not His own Son (Rom. viii. 32).

Thus Abraham received Isaac 'in a figure' 'from the dead.' And how happily he must have gone back to Beersheba, blessing God, and with Isaac dearer to him than ever! 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.' After this great exhibition of his faith and obedience Abraham had renewed to him the promise made to him at first (Gen. xii. 3): '**In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed**; because thou hast obeyed My voice' (v. 18).

LESSONS

1. We must obey God when it seems very hard to do what He commands, and though we do not understand why He asks us to do it. The Christian must endure hardness (2 Tim. ii. 3).

2. 'God spared not His own Son.' His Son spared not Himself. Abraham did not spare Isaac, and we must not spare anything God calls us to give up.

3. Most duties are difficult. Things easily done are things about which we should ask, 'Is it right to do them?'

4. However hard a duty may seem, we need not be afraid to perform it. God will make it possible for us, and we may leave the result in His hand. We shall be happy in our obedience, and find that obedience makes us better and stronger for duty.

VI.—ISAAC, REBEKAH, ESAU, AND JACOB

Gen. xxvii. 1-45

Introduction.—In last lesson Isaac was a young man, so strong that he carried a heavy burden of wood up Mount Moriah. Now he appears aged, feeble, and blind. There he was seen as an obedient son, submissive to his father's will; here he is described as the old father of two sons, whose conduct caused him much sorrow and vexation. Good people sometimes indulge their children more than they ought, and if they do they are sure to suffer for their fault. Esau, the elder son, grew up a rough hunter and married two heathen wives, who were a grief of mind to his father and mother. Jacob was a gentler youth, of steady, domestic habits, and his mother's favourite. She was not truthful, and she taught Jacob to deceive his father. One day Esau came in wearied and hungry from the fields and found Jacob with a mess of pottage of which he was about to partake. It was made of red lentiles and gave out an odour very tempting to a hungry man, and he asked his brother to share it with him. Jacob asked him to sell his birthright for the pottage, and Esau consented. The eldest son in early times had many privileges. As the family spread out he became a chieftain and was a kind of priest. The father gave his chief blessing to the eldest son, and in the family of Abraham the blessing carried with it the promises given to him. Jacob valued these privileges, and God meant that he should have them, not Esau, that 'profane person' who despised them. Jacob and Esau were twins, and it may have seemed hard to Rebekah and Jacob that one not really older, and who attached little value to it, should have the birthright. They should have trusted God to bring about His own promise, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' In taking their own wrong way to secure it they found trouble and sorrow. We should 'trust in God and do the right.' Esau said, 'I am about to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me?'—so he sold his birthright to Jacob, and confirmed the bargain by an oath.

I. **A wicked Plot** (vv. 1-21).—One day Isaac called Esau—his favourite as Jacob was Rebekah's—and bade him go into the fields and fetch him venison, that as he ate of it his love might be warmed, and that he might bless him with all his heart before he died. Rebekah heard the words of her husband to Esau, and believing that his blessing would bring advantage to Esau, she resolved to obtain it for Jacob. So she told Jacob to kill two kids, with which she prepared savoury meat such as she knew Isaac loved. Then putting on him garments belonging to Esau, and placing the kids' skins upon his hands and neck, she bade him go in to his father and say he was Esau. Isaac at Gerar had taught Rebekah to deceive (xxvi. 7), and now she uses the weapon against himself at Beersheba. At this time Isaac was about 137 years old. At this age his brother Ishmael had died (xxv. 17), and the remembrance may have made him think his own death near, though it did not take place till more than forty years afterwards. His sight was so dim that he could not tell the difference between his sons except by their voices or by feeling them, for Esau was rough and hairy, while Jacob was smooth-skinned. As Isaac waited for Esau's return from hunting, Jacob came in with the food

his mother had quickly made ready in the way Isaac loved. He entered into the plot, his mother telling him she would take all the responsibility—'Upon me be thy curse.' But this cannot be. Every man must bear his own burden. She bade him obey her, but children should obey their parents *in the Lord*. She put on him goodly raiment of her eldest son (v. 15), to make the deception safe. When Isaac, astonished at the quickness with which as he thought Esau had returned, asked the explanation, Jacob added blasphemy to his other sins of deceit and lying. 'The Lord thy God brought it to me' (v. 20). This reference to Jehovah was very wicked.

II. **The deceived Father** (vv. 22-29).—Jacob perhaps forgot at first that his voice was different from Esau's, and Isaac, noting the difference, asked him to come near that he might feel him, and then said, 'Art thou my very son Esau?' And he said, 'I am.' Then Jacob gave him the venison and brought him wine, and he ate and drank. His suspicions were not quite quieted, and he asked Jacob to kiss him that he might discover by smell whether he had come from the field or the fold. Rebekah had taken precautions against this risk. Smelling Esau's garments Isaac was satisfied, and said, 'The smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Jehovah hath blessed.' [In many parts of Palestine after a refreshing rain the plains give out a most delicious perfume.]

Then Isaac pronounced on Jacob the blessing of the first-born. He was to possess a land blessed with dew (which in Palestine is needed for fertility, for unless it falls plentifully, after the rains have ceased, the ground is barren) and famed for 'fatness of earth' or richness of soil. He was to be master of many peoples and nations, and his brethren were to be his servants. The prophecy was fulfilled in the days of David and Solomon, but had a reference to the rule of the Messiah. He alone bore the blessing of the first-born. Others share the privileges only through Him. The promise first given to Abraham (Gen. xii. 3) was renewed, though without the assurance given to Abraham and to Isaac (xii. 3; xxii. 18; xxvi. 4)—'In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Perhaps it was not repeated now, because of the worldly conduct of all concerned in the history of this chapter.

III. **The Fraud discovered** (vv. 30-40).—Jacob had just gone out from Isaac when Esau returned. When he told his father that he had brought him the savoury food he loved, Isaac discovered the deceit that had been practised on him. He trembled. He saw he had been unwittingly accomplishing God's will, and that in trying to arrange the future according to his own will he had been resisting God, and that all attempts to resist were vain: 'he shall be blessed.'

Isaac was humbled, but Esau was moved to vexation and furious wrath. His profanity in selling the birthright has found him out. 'He cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry.' It was easy to blame Jacob, and he deserved blame, but no power but his own will could have deprived Esau of the birthright. He lost it because he did not value it. He sold it 'for one morsel of meat' (Heb. xii. 16). Afterward when he would have inherited the blessing he was rejected (Heb. xii. 17). It was too late. Let us covet earnestly the best gifts now; we shall know their value when the whole world will have no power to give comfort.

Instead of blaming himself for his own sin, Esau's mind is filled

with anger against Jacob. Isaac told Esau that he should be inferior to his brother, that his dwelling should be (Revised Version, margin) away from the fatness of the earth. [The country around Mount Seir inherited by Esau is described as 'perhaps the most desolate and stern in the world' (Mal. i. 3). Robinson states that the mountains 'are wholly desert and sterile.'] Unlike Jacob, who was to draw his support from a fruitful soil, Esau was to owe all to the sword, and Isaac prophesies a continuous and not always unsuccessful resistance offered by him to Jacob's supremacy. The prediction was fulfilled to the letter (1 Sam. xiv. 47; 2 Sam. viii. 14). Finally, through Antipater and Herod, Esau reigned over Jacob.

IV. **The Fruit of Wrong-doing** (vv. 41-45).—Esau resolved to kill his brother. He said it in his heart, but he must also have spoken of it; for his purpose was repeated to Rebekah. He was frank and open, not cunning like his mother and brother. Craft and cunning are natural to the Syrian, and Rebekah and Laban her brother were given to deceit. She was sorely punished for her sin, for it broke up her home. Jacob had to flee and toil as an exile for twenty years, instead of leading a life such as he loved in his father's house, and mother and son never met again. Esau loved his father and would not grieve him by killing his brother while Isaac lived, but he 'comforted' himself with the thought that the opportunity would come. Rebekah urged Jacob to flee to her brother Laban's house at Padanaram 'for a few days,' till Esau's fury would pass away, 'then,' she said, 'I will send and fetch thee.' Man proposes, God disposes. She did not foresee that they were never to meet again. Rebekah offered Isaac a different reason for Jacob's departure from that which she urged with Jacob. Having herself been the cause of strife between the brothers, she did not refer to that, but stated, no doubt sincerely, her wish that Jacob should marry one of his own kindred instead of following his brother's bad example (v. 46).

LESSONS

Deceit can never bring lasting success. We never lose anything worth having by being faithful to God and duty: we do lose by cunning and falsehood. Jacob after his deceit enjoyed little worldly comfort: he had to flee from home; Laban deceived him; Reuben dishonoured him; Simeon and Levi grieved him by their treachery and cruelty; Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin; his sons imposed upon him; he mourned the supposed death of Joseph; and he died in a strange land. 'Few and evil' were the days of his pilgrimage.

VII.—JACOB'S VISION AT BETHEL

Gen. xxviii. 10-22

Introduction.—Isaac submitted to the will of God and acknowledged Jacob as the heir of promise, so he blessed him anew and sent him to Haran to seek a wife from the family of Laban, his mother's kinsman, and Rebekah hastened his going that he might be beyond the reach of his angry brother. Jacob, who loved home and had hitherto had all the comforts of his wealthy father's house, went forth a wanderer, unhappy and alone—unhappy because his conscience charged him with great sin, and alone because of that sin. When conscience convicts us we can have no peace except in going to God, confessing sin and asking His forgiveness. Jacob did not know God as we do, and seems to have thought he was leaving Him behind in Beersheba, but he discovered in this journey that He is everywhere (v. 16). The journey from Beersheba to Haran leads through a great part of Canaan from south to north—then crossing the Jordan, it conducts through Gilead, Bashan, and Damascus, to Mesopotamia. It must have taken some days to reach the place where he had the vision of the ladder.

I. **The Sleep** (vv. 10, 11).—Jacob had left Beersheba with a sad heart. He was in a sense a runaway from home, suffering the consequences of his own and his mother's deceit. [Illustrate by boy's feelings who had done a wrong thing to a brother or a school-fellow. If he is alone, and for any reason away from home, his feelings are all the keener and more bitter.] It was now perhaps the third night of Jacob's journey, when he lighted upon a certain place—*the place*—indicating that it was appointed by God for the purpose of the vision. He was there all night under the open sky. [Pilgrims during favourable seasons often wrap their cloaks around them and lie all night upon the ground.] We may picture Jacob's feelings alone under the stars with his painful thoughts, knowing that he dared not return, and ignorant what reception awaited him at Haran. He had hoped to be the heir of Abraham, and Isaac's blessing had been spoken over him, but now he was leaving the land of promise and, as he thought, his fathers' God behind. He took of the stones, and one of them became his pillow.

II. **The Vision** (vv. 12-15).—Jacob needed to be taught that God is everywhere, and that He can bless or punish in all places. This God taught him by a dream and the vision of a ladder. What did he see? The ladder reaching from earth to heaven taught him that there is a close connection between the two, that God comes down to man and that man by God's help may rise to God. The angels passing up and down taught that there is a continual providence watching over God's servants, and God standing above angels and ladder showed Him to be Lord of men and angels, of earth and heaven. Jacob was taught that he was not forsaken or forgotten by the God of his fathers, but was still under Divine view and protection. The ladder had a deeper meaning, pointing (John i. 51) to the Son of man, through Whom alone as the way to heaven

we come to God. The foot of the ladder was yet upon the earth. On earth Jesus lived, laboured, and died, that through death He might remove every obstacle to man's return to God. The top reached to heaven, so that it formed a means of communication between heaven and earth (Heb. ix. 24).

That Jacob might understand the vision, he heard the voice of Jehovah. 'He does not break the bruised reed' (Isa. xlii. 3). 'He upbraideth not' (Jas. i. 5). He spoke wonderful words of comfort and promise to Jacob. He was still his God as He was the God of Abraham and Isaac. He confirms to him the promises made to them (xxii. 17; xxvi. 4). There is a promise here of increase and extension to his family and nation (vv. 13, 14) —a promise that in his seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. How and when was that fulfilled? And there is a gracious promise to himself in view of his present needs. A promise of the abiding presence with him of Jehovah to protect and to restore him (v. 15; compare Exod. xxxiii. 14).

III. **The Awaking** (vv. 16-19).—Jacob awoke from his dream. What were his first words (v. 16)? He was afraid because of God's presence. What did he say now (v. 17)? His heart was not yet right with God, and he did not feel at home with Him. He had not yet learned to rest like a little child in the keeping of Him who said, 'Jacob have I loved.' It is only love that casts out fear (Ps. xxvi. 8; 1 John iv. 18). To the heart established in the knowledge of God one day in His courts is better than a thousand elsewhere; but at this point in his history Jacob was only beginning to know God.

When he rose in the morning, he set up the stone he had for a pillow as a memorial and a pledge of his vow (v. 20), *pouring oil upon it* to consecrate it. [A stone set up was the most ancient form of temple or place for worship. Such stones were consecrated like persons, by anointing with oil.] He then gave the place the name of Bethel—God's house. Bethel, twelve miles north of Jerusalem, continued to be one of the oldest and one of the most famous centres of worship. Here Abraham had built an altar (xii. 8) years before.

IV. **The Vow** (vv. 20-22).—Jacob vowed a vow. What is a vow? A promise to God to do something for Him. What were the terms of Jacob's vow? God had promised these things. It was Jacob's nature to make a bargain (xxv. 31; xxix. 18), and his words show how little at that time he knew God. He thought Him One like himself, and his desires rise no higher than bread and raiment and safe return to his father's house. 'He had not got to the end of himself, and so he had not begun with God.' He wished to get back again in peace—he feared Esau might kill him. If God should grant it, then he said the Lord shall be my God—not only as Jehovah, but as his own personal covenant God.

The stone was to be a monument of God's presence and dwelling with His people. Moreover, he promises to give the tenth of all that he should acquire. Even before the law, this was a recognised duty (xiv. 20; Lev. xxvii. 30, 31; Num. xviii. 24; Deut. xiv. 28, 29). God's gifts of mercy call for returns of duty. Giving is a part of worship as well as praying.

LESSONS

1. God is everywhere.
2. Christ is the ladder by which all God's promises and gifts come down to us, and by which all our faith and prayers and service rise to Him. There is a way from God to man, and by this way man can go to God.
3. Heaven is nearer than many think.
4. Jacob's resolution, 'The Lord shall be my God,' should be ours.

VIII.—JOSEPH AT HOME

Gen. xxxvii.

Introduction.—Jacob was punished for his wicked behaviour at Beer-sheba by having to leave home and its comforts, by never seeing his mother again, by having to live a hard life of toil, and by being cheated himself as he had cheated Isaac. God was merciful to him, forgave his sin, and showed him much favour; but Jacob found, as we all find, that however sorry people may be for having done wrong, their sins follow them with bitter consequences. He had gone to his uncle Laban at Padanaram, who made him welcome, but laid heavy burdens of work upon him (xxxi. 40).

I. **Jacob's Household.**—Jacob loved Laban's daughter Rachel, and wished to marry her. Laban said he would grant his desire if Jacob would work as his servant for seven years, and pretended, when the time came round, that the daughter he brought to Jacob, whose face was hidden from the bridegroom by a veil during the marriage, was Rachel, while it was really her elder sister Leah. Laban said he would give Rachel too to Jacob if he would serve for her other seven years, which he did, and the love he bore to her was so great that the time seemed like a few days. Jacob was a very careful shepherd, and Laban's flocks and herds increased greatly. At the end of the fourteen years Jacob got a portion of the flocks in payment of his labour, and soon came to own a great number of cattle, so that Laban and his sons grew jealous and made him very uncomfortable. When six years had passed, in addition to the fourteen during which he had worked for his wives, he told Leah and Rachel privately that he meant to leave Padanaram. His reason for this was that Laban had repeatedly deceived him, and his success was due, not to Laban, but to his fathers' God, who had blessed him and now called him to leave Laban and go back to the land of Canaan. Jacob was by this time the father of several children, and his wives were willing to go with him. They went off, taking with them 'all Jacob's cattle and all his goods which he had gotten.' They went on to Canaan, where they stopped for a time at Succoth, at Shalem in Shechem, and, by God's command, at Bethel, where the covenant promise was renewed. From Bethel Jacob went beyond Bethlehem, where his youngest son Benjamin was born, and where his dearly loved Rachel died. Then he went to his father Isaac at Hebron, was present at his death, and, with Esau his brother, laid his body in the grave.

II. **Family Divisions** (vv. 1-11).—The household of Jacob was not a happy one. He was not a prudent father, and the favour which he showed Joseph had a bad effect upon his other children. Joseph was a good youth and a loving, obedient son, 'a goodly person and well favoured,' who, as we shall see, won confidence and respect from master and jailer, from captive and king.

1. **Joseph his father's favourite.**—Possessing attractive qualities, being the son of his old age and the first-born of his beloved Rachel, it was natural that Joseph should be greatly loved by his father; but when Jacob

showed his preference by dressing him in finer clothes than his brothers he acted very foolishly and drew upon Joseph the anger and hatred of the rest. Meaning to be kind he was really cruel to his dearest son. The others were not good like him, and they were jealous as they saw him dressed in his coat of many colours. It was foolish too in Jacob to send Joseph to report on his brothers' conduct. It increased their hatred when they knew that 'he brought unto his father their evil report.'

2. **Joseph's dreams.**—The brothers' hatred was increased by a dream which Joseph told them. 'We were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.' A second dream made matters worse when he told that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down before him. They hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words. [God often made known His purposes to men in dreams before He gave them a Book in which is written all He wishes to reveal. Joseph's dreams were prophecies, and Jacob seems so to have understood them.] His brothers were very angry, and nicknamed him 'the dreamer.' The first dream referred to his brothers only, the second to his parents also. The first he told to his brothers, the second to his father also. Jacob rebuked him, perhaps because he saw the effect on his brothers.

III. **The Result of Envy** (vv. 12-28).—Jacob was now living near Hebron, but he appears to have left some of his flocks under the care of his sons near Shechem, fifty miles from Hebron, to the north. He sent Joseph to visit and report upon his brethren. Joseph had some difficulty in finding them, but at last discovered them at Dothan. Take note of their conduct.

1. They showed themselves **unnatural brothers.**—They saw Joseph coming and plotted to kill him. It was a cruel deed to be even thought of by brothers: their plan was to kill him and cast him into a pit, and then to say to their father that a wild beast had devoured him (v. 20).

[Travellers say there are thousands of pits in Upper Galilee, which have been hollowed out by Arab shepherds for use as cisterns to catch and preserve the rain water. They have narrow mouths, but widen towards the bottom. Some of them are very deep, and the sides are as smooth as glass, so that they could be used as prisons, as in the case of Joseph.]

2. **Reuben has pity.**—Only one of the ten was moved with pity, but had not courage to act as he felt. Reuben had good impulses but was 'unstable as water' (xlix. 4). He did not separate himself from the rest and protest against their sin, but asked them, instead of shedding Joseph's blood, to cast him into a pit, meaning to come secretly and send him back to Jacob. They acted upon Reuben's counsel.

3. **'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel'** (Prov. xii. 10).—They seized Joseph and 'stript him out of his coat, his coat of many colours, that was on him.' Ten against one—their brother, the youngest of all! They cast him into the pit. The pit was empty—no water in it, so that he was not drowned (Zech. ix. 11). There Joseph was left alone. Yet not alone. **'God was with him'** (Acts vii. 9).

4. **Judah's proposal.**—As Joseph's brethren, except Reuben, sat down to eat, a caravan of Arab merchants came up, going to Egypt with balsam

and spices. **Judah proposed to sell him.** This plan upset Reuben's intention, but it accomplished God's purpose. The sale was effected. Joseph was lifted from the pit and taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites.

IV. **Jacob deceived** (vv. 29-36).—When Reuben returned he was in great distress. He felt he could not go home nor face his father. Sorrow came too late. If we do what is right bravely we shall not have cause for vain regrets. To conceal their guilt the brothers killed a goat, dipped Joseph's coat in the blood, and sent it to their father. They did not go themselves but sent messengers with it, pretending they did not know whether it was Joseph's or not. Jacob's distress was terrible. He rent his clothes. He knew the coat, refused to be comforted, and put on sackcloth, the garment of mourning. As he had deceived his father, so he is deceived by his sons. His sons when they returned together with their wives tried to comfort him, but none could fill the place that was empty. He would not accept any comfort, but was filled with grief at the loss of his favourite son.

In Egypt Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, captain of the king's guard. We shall meet him again at Potiphar's house.

LESSONS

1. One sin leads to another. Those who are envious cease to be pitiful and become cruel (Prov. xxvii. 4).

2. God often effects His purposes by means that seem to contradict His promises. God makes all things, even the wicked deeds of wicked men work together for good to them that love Him.

3. His people may trust Him at all times, even when He seems to hide His face.

IX.—JOSEPH IN PRISON

Gen. xxxix. 20-23; xl.

Introduction.—Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, and sold as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the king's lifeguard. Instead of fretting and complaining of his hard lot, he determined to work faithfully for his master. He knew it was God's will that he should be away from home and a poor slave, for he had learned from Isaac and Jacob that their God directed and governed the lives of those to whom He had given promises. He trusted God, and though his condition did not seem likely to be one from which he could rise to honour, he was comforted by what had been shown to him in his dreams. God was with him and blessed him in his work.

I. **Joseph in the House of Potiphar** (xxxix. 1-6).—Joseph was not long in the service of Potiphar till his master learned to trust him wholly. Potiphar soon found that everything Joseph did was well and faithfully done, so more trust was placed in him, until at last he was made overseer of the house, and over all that Potiphar had 'in the house and in the field.' Everything was so entirely under his care that Potiphar himself did not know what he had except the bread or food which he ate, for the Egyptian laws about defilement, like those of the caste Hindoos now, forbade that foreigners, especially of the shepherd class, should touch the food of an Egyptian of rank. Joseph managed so well that everything went smoothly. No doubt he had many longing thoughts of his father and his home, but it must have been a pleasure to him to find that he was trusted and respected. To have wept over his hard fortune would not have mended matters, and it was wise and brave to give himself heartily to present duty, and leave God to deliver him in His own time and way. For ten years Joseph had been overseer in Potiphar's house and manager of his property. [The Egyptians built beautiful tombs for their dead, and painted on the walls scenes from the daily life of the people. Many of these remain, some of them painted as long ago as the time of Joseph, and the equal climate and dry air of Egypt have kept them as fresh as if they were newly done. There is hardly a tomb of a rich man, on the wall-paintings of which we do not find an overseer at work. Wherever grain is being measured, or metal weighed, or building, or field work going on, we see him with a short rod in his hand, directing the workers, or with a writing-tablet in his hand and a pen behind his ear to take down the weights and numbers; and, like Joseph, he is called 'the overseer.']

II. **Joseph cast into Prison** (vv. 7-20).—Now a sudden change came over the lot of Joseph, and Potiphar's confidence in him came to a close, not through any misconduct on his part, but through the lying and malice of his master's wife. The result was that the faithful overseer was cast into prison. This Egyptian prison was, probably, a turret or rounded building or apartment, and appears (xl. 3) to have been attached to Potiphar's house. Joseph speaks of it as a dungeon or pit. [Prisons in old times were places in which great suffering was caused to those cast into

them. We may still see in old castles, as at St. Andrews, Dunnottar, and many other places, the dark, dreary dungeons in which prisoners were confined even in Scotland not very long ago.] In the prison Joseph was at first very cruelly treated—'Whose feet they hurt with the fetters: he was laid in iron' (Ps. cv. 18). It was a hard lot to be the victim of others' wickedness—first sold into slavery by his envious brothers, now cast into prison by a cruel, wicked woman's falsehood, and regarded as ungrateful and unworthy by the kind master for whom he had worked so faithfully. In his extremity he might have been tempted to think that God had forsaken him. The faith of John the Baptist seems to have been shaken when he was in prison, but Joseph's, so far as we know, never failed. He trusted God, and God was faithful to His promise. Long afterwards Joseph could *see* that God meant it unto good (Gen. l. 20).

III. **Joseph's Occupation in Prison** (vv. 21-23).—The captain of the king's guard, Potiphar, was over the prison arrangements (Jer. xxxvii. 15), and he handed Joseph over to his subordinate, the keeper. It has been thought that he did not quite believe his wife's story, for if he had, he might have punished Joseph more severely; but that he put him in prison that time might show how the truth lay. A jailer's eyes are suspicious, but the keeper soon saw the innocence of Joseph, and, like Potiphar, gave him a responsible charge. He was still a prisoner, but was made a kind of under-keeper, and not fettered and confined in irons as at first.

IV. **Joseph's Companions in Prison** (xl. 1-4).—Two important prisoners were after a time brought into the prison—the king's chief butler and baker. The offices of the cupbearer and baker were high and honourable, for both had it in charge to protect the king's life from poison. The Pharaohs drank only wine handed them by the cupbearers, who thus were often beside the king; the confectioner supplied the king and court with bake-meats and cakes in which Egyptians delighted, and was responsible for their purity. Tradition says that the two had plotted to poison the king.

Potiphar gave Joseph in charge to the keeper of the prison, but when the two high officers of Pharaoh's household were, by royal command, imprisoned, he took charge of them himself, bidding Joseph act as their servant. Though he had acted as if he believed his wife's accusation, Potiphar showed by this that he still trusted Joseph.

V. **Dreams interpreted and fulfilled** (vv. 5-19).—The chief butler and the chief baker while in prison had each a dream. Many of the old inscriptions show that the Egyptians attached great importance to dreams. They thought they came from the gods to make known future events. The priests used to interpret the dreams, but prisoners could not consult them. Accordingly the chief butler and the chief baker were sad. The dreams might show them what was to be their fate, but they could not go out to see a priest, and had no other interpreter. Joseph marked their sadness, was told the reason, and said, 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' Joseph shows his faith in his fathers' God, and bids them tell their dreams.

What was the chief butler's dream? [The vine and the juice of the

grape as a beverage were familiar in the valley of the Nile. On the tombs at the Pyramids are pictures of slaves engaged in gathering grapes and packing them in baskets, and of others pressing the juice out of the clusters and storing it in jars. At Thebes there is a picture of a great garden with a vineyard in the middle, in which a boy scares off birds from the ripe grapes and men tread out the clusters in a huge vat. The master stands by, enters the quantities in a book, and sees jars filled with juice, packed side by side in his cellar. Men and women are represented who are evidently drunk with wine.] The cupbearer saw in his sleep a vine with three branches, which presently blossomed and then hung thick with ripened grapes, which he plucked and pressed into Pharaoh's cup. For him Joseph had a happy interpretation. What was it? What promise did he ask of the cupbearer?

What was the chief baker's dream? The baker's dream, like the butler's, was about his official work. [The monuments show us bakers carrying bread in baskets on their heads. The Egyptians were very fond of pastry.] For him Joseph had a dark prospect. What was it?

The baker's head was lifted up in a very different sense from that of the butler. The birds of prey here take the place which Pharaoh had in the butler's dream. This was the heaviest doom an Egyptian could suffer, for he thought the preservation of the body was needful for the comfortable existence of the spirit. This was the reason for embalming. The baker's guilt must have been regarded as very great, to deserve such a punishment.

The dreams were fulfilled to the letter. On Pharaoh's birthday, which was kept with great pomp, prisoners were often set free amid the general rejoicing. The cupbearer was then set at liberty and the chief baker was hanged, as Joseph had foretold. But the cupbearer forgot his promise, and Joseph was left in prison.

LESSONS

1. Godliness is profitable for all things. When we suffer for welldoing, we should take it patiently, and trust God to clear our character (Matt. v. 10). God is always with His servants, in adversity as in prosperity.

2. God is the only interpreter who knows the end of a thing from the beginning.

3. Man's promises are often forgotten; God is faithful who hath promised.

X.—JOSEPH RULER OF EGYPT

Gen. xli.

I. **Joseph remembered.**—Forgotten by men, Joseph was left in prison for two years after he had interpreted the dreams of the butler and baker. But God remembered him, and deliverance came. All this time the butler never thought of the prisoner who had interpreted his dream, but at last an event happened that caused him to remember Joseph's touching appeal.

1. **Pharaoh's dream** (vv. 1-7).—Pharaoh had dreamed twice. Like the dreams of his officers, his dream was connected with his position, and with the future in store for him. (1) He thought he stood on the banks of the water which the Egyptians called *the river*—that Nile which was and is the source of Egypt's prosperity—and saw seven kine rise out of the river. [The cow was the animal held most sacred in Egypt. In the Serapeum, a large underground chamber discovered nearly thirty years ago, there are thirty-three huge stone coffins, each weighing many tons, which had once contained mummies of as many sacred bulls.] They were sleek and fat, and they passed along grazing quietly on the green banks. All at once seven other kine rose out of it, so ugly and so lean that Pharaoh had never seen their like, and they went up to the fat ones and ate them all up, and yet they continued to look as thin and poor as ever. (2) After this dream the king awoke, but soon fell asleep again, and had a second dream. This time he saw seven rich heavy ears of corn, all growing from one stalk, and then other seven ears lank, thin, and parched by the east wind. [Wheat still grows in Egypt which bears several heads on one stem. The east wind, or rather south-east wind, which blows across the desert in the spring months, withers and blasts the grass, if it blows long.] These thin ears ate up the full ones, and then the king awoke.

2. **Pharaoh's perplexity** (vv. 8-13).—The dream twice dreamed had greatly impressed him. He was alarmed, and called all the learned men and magicians of his kingdom, to whom he told it, and asked the interpretation. These magicians were a learned body of priests who read dreams and professed to tell future events. But they were unable to tell what the dream meant. Then God touched the butler's conscience and brought his ingratitude to Joseph into his memory. He told the king that at the time when he and the chief baker had been in disgrace and imprisoned they had each a strange dream, and when they could not interpret them, a Hebrew youth, also a prisoner, had made known their meaning, and all he told them had come to pass. This information was acted upon at once by the king, who sent for Joseph to the prison. His prison clothes were cast off; his head and face were shaved, for the Egyptians wore their own hair only in mourning; raiment suitable for appearing at court was hastily provided, and Joseph was brought to the king. [When the old Egyptian artists represent low or slovenly persons, they paint them with beards. Bearded persons were counted unclean, and would not have been admitted into the king's presence.]

3. **Joseph interprets the dream** (vv. 14-36).—Pharaoh told him he had sent for him because he had heard that he could interpret any dream.

But Joseph, now as formerly, points to his God as the only interpreter, and expresses his hope that God would enable him to interpret the dream as a peaceful message from Himself. Then the king told the dream to Joseph as he had before to the Egyptian wise men, and Joseph, taught of God, showed its meaning. It was an intimation that Egypt was to have seven years of extraordinary fertility and abundance, and afterwards other seven of famine so dreadful that the years of plenty would be forgotten. The two dreams had one meaning—the fat kine and the full ears were years of plenty, the lean kine and lank ears, years of famine.

II. **Joseph honoured.**—After interpreting the dreams Joseph advised the king to make provision in the seven years of plenty against the years of barrenness that would certainly follow them, and suggested that Pharaoh should appoint some discreet and wise man to be over the whole land with officers under him, whose business it would be to build granaries and collect and store up one-fifth of the produce of the land during the plenteous years for provision against the time of need. The interpretation pleased the king, who was glad to have his fears relieved, and Joseph's prudent advice was at once followed.

1. **Joseph Prime Minister of Egypt** (vv. 37-44).—Joseph was himself appointed to carry out the plan he had sketched, for the king wisely thought that no one could do it better than 'a man in whom the Spirit of God is.' The king's courtiers agreed with him, and with a suddenness which is possible only in lands where the sovereign's will is law, the man who had risen in the morning a prisoner and a slave, found himself that day Prime Minister of Egypt. Look at the tokens of honour bestowed upon Joseph. The king took off his signet ring and gave it to Joseph—a great honour, for it was the signet ring with which royal orders were sealed. He was clothed in fine linen and the robes of the priesthood, the highest class in Egypt. He was set over the palace and the nation, and a gold neck-chain was put on him as the official sign of authority, second only to that of the king. The second royal chariot, placed at his disposal, carried him through the streets of Memphis, and heralds running before with the cry, 'Bow the knee!' intimated that this was the man whom the king delighted to honour. Moreover, Pharaoh committed supreme power to Joseph when he said, **'I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt'** (v. 44).

2. **Joseph married** (vv. 45, 50-52).—Pharaoh now made Joseph an Egyptian by giving him a new name, Zaphnath-paaneah. When this was done he gave him an Egyptian wife. Who was she? **On,** here mentioned, was five miles from Cairo, the present capital of Egypt, and was famous for the worship of the sun. The priests of On were foremost in the Egyptian priesthood, and so the connection gave Joseph a high place in the land. [Part of the temple of On remains since Joseph's time.] Joseph had two sons born to him. What were their names? It is interesting to notice that two Hebrew tribes had Egyptian blood in them through Asenath, who probably adopted her husband's faith and worshipped the God of Israel.

3. **Joseph exercising his powers** (vv. 46-49, 53-57).—Joseph was now thirty years of age, and had been already thirteen years in Egypt. The years of plenty came on and Joseph faithfully served the king. Corn

was laid up in the cities in wonderful quantities during harvests so plenteous that the grain could not be measured at the stores. Then came the years of famine, which spread over many lands, and not Egyptians only, but starving men from Palestine and other countries, came to Joseph to buy corn. The drought affected neighbouring countries, and all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands. What a wonderful position for Joseph, the Hebrew, who had been sold and had worked as a slave in Egypt! '**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom**' (Ps. cxi. 10). '**Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings**' (Prov. xxii. 29).

LESSONS

1. God's power to make kings and all men do His will.
2. God's time is the best time.
3. The bread of earth may fail, but the bread of life (John vi. 35) never perishes, and may always be had by those who ask it.

XI.—MEETING AGAIN OF JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN AND FATHER

Gen. xlii.-xlv., xlvi. 1-7, 28-30

Introduction.—The humiliation and sufferings of Joseph were now ended (Gen. xlix. 23, 24). He was next to the king in the most powerful kingdom of that day, his wife was of noble rank, and two boys had been given him to brighten his new home and to be trained by him in the faith and fear of the God of his fathers. He was as faithful and diligent in honouring God and in serving Pharaoh as he had proved himself in the house of Potiphar and in prison. While the fruitful years lasted he built granaries, and gathered in grain, in great quantities, till all the storehouses were packed. Then came the seven years of famine. The Nile no longer overflowed its banks to fertilise the seed corn. People had perhaps come to think that the fruitful years would continue without check, and did not store up for the future, and when the crops failed they were soon in want. [Sometimes still there is not sufficient water in the Nile, and then a scarcity and great suffering are caused; but such a long succession of failures does not often occur. The suffering caused by famine is shown in the narrative 2 Kings vi. 24-33. There is an interesting inscription on a very old tomb, which is thought to refer to the famine in the time of Joseph. It tells the dead man's story, and closes thus: 'I collected the harvest, for I was a friend of the harvest-God. I was watchful at the time of sowing, and now when a famine arose, lasting many years, I issued corn to the city to each hungry person.']

I. **The Famine felt by the Family of Jacob** (xlii. 1-5).—The famine affected not Egypt only, but surrounding countries, for Egypt was then the great harvest-field of the East; and soon corn was to be had nowhere except at Joseph's granaries, and people came from all quarters to buy from him. Especially is the famine felt in Canaan. There Jacob and his sons are still living. Scarcity of food is pinching their home, and though Jacob is rich, there is no corn to be had for money in Canaan. Jacob is an old man but his sons are strong, and as he remembers how he himself had toiled in hard times he does not like to see them going about, 'looking upon one another, hungry and helpless.' He has heard that there is corn in Egypt; why should they not go there and buy the food they all so much needed? So the brothers did as their father advised, and were soon in Joseph's presence. 'He it was that sold to all the people of the land,' not personally to all, but he regulated the sales and fixed the prices, and had, perhaps—expecting that his brothers would come among the purchasers—arranged that when a company of foreigners came he should be consulted.

II. **The Brothers proved and penitent** (vv. 6-38).—Now his dream was partly fulfilled (Gen. xxxvii.) 'Joseph's brethren came and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth' (v. 6). Joseph knew them. They still wore their old shepherd dress, and the twenty years that had passed since they sold him had not changed them as he was changed in appearance, for he had adopted the manners and dress of Egypt, had advanced from youth to man-

hood, and his face was probably darkened by the strong southern sun. 'He spoke roughly to them' (v. 7), partly to disguise his voice and partly to prove them, that he might find if they were sorry for their treatment of him.

There was one of the sons of Jacob in whom Joseph had a peculiar interest. Which was that? What was he to Joseph (Gen. xxxv. 24)? And he wondered why he was not with the ten. Had they treated Benjamin as they had dealt with him? He cannot question them directly, for to show his knowledge of their family history would raise their suspicions about himself. So he accused them of being spies. Joseph insisted that the account they gave of themselves—that they were all one man's sons, that they were twelve in number, one of whom 'was not,' while the youngest was with their father in Canaan—must be proved. He said one of them must go and fetch their young brother, and that the others should be kept in prison till the return of the two. On the third day of their imprisonment, however, he told them that he would be satisfied if one of them remained. Sparing Reuben, perhaps because he discovered now (vv. 21-23) that he had not been so guilty as the others, he selected the next in age, 'and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.' The character of Joseph is a very noble one. It is less marked by wrong-doing than that of any other patriarch. But when he said to his brothers, 'By the life of Pharaoh ye are spies,' we must condemn his language and his behaviour. Whatever his motives may have been, he should not have said what in his heart he knew to be untrue.

On their way home the nine brothers made a discovery that alarmed them. In each man's sack the money he had paid for corn was found. Joseph had ordered it to be placed there, but without telling his brothers, and when they saw the money 'their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?' When they came to Canaan they told Jacob all that had befallen them. He was greatly distressed, and said, 'All these things are against me' (v. 36). It was a sad home. When the brothers spoke to Jacob of taking Benjamin to Egypt, and Reuben made the foolish offer that if he failed to bring Benjamin safely back his father might kill his two sons, the old man said, No! 'my son shall not go down.' To lose Benjamin as well as Joseph would be to bring him to the grave (v. 38).

III. **Joseph revealed** (xliii.-xlv.)—After a little time food again failed them, and Jacob himself urged the brothers to go to Egypt for fresh supplies. With great reluctance, and pressed by necessity, Jacob allowed Benjamin to go with them. When they were brought before Joseph his eyes quickly lighted upon Benjamin, whom he had last seen a little four-year-old boy. He bade his steward take them all to his palace, where Joseph asked them kindly of their father. Simeon was brought to them, and once more they bowed down before Joseph, and he said, 'Is this your younger brother?' With swelling heart he calmed himself sufficiently to pronounce a blessing on Benjamin, and then the floods came; he hurried away, seeking a place to weep, 'and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.' Then a great feast was made, at which Benjamin was honoured. After testing their sincerity further and seeing their anxiety to take Benjamin back safe to their father—so different from their treatment of himself—Joseph was

overcome by feeling: 'he could not refrain himself before all that stood by him' (xlv. 1). He cleared the room and was alone with his brothers.

Listen now to his brotherly words—'I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?' And then in words that are a lesson to all who have been wronged he added, 'I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither.' I am your brother now as in the old days in Canaan. 'God did send me before you to preserve life; it was not you that sent me hither, but God' (v. 5). It is a striking picture. On the one hand Joseph in white linen and gold chain and glittering ring, his smooth shaven face wet with tears, his eyes beaming on Benjamin through the swollen lids, speaking forgiveness, comforting them with the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God; and before him his bearded brothers in Hebrew dress, stained more or less with travel, stunned with surprise and fear, 'for they were troubled at his presence.' Then out of the abundance of his heart Joseph's mouth speaks, 'Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not.'

IV. **The Father comforted and the Family settled** (xlvi. 1-7, 28-30). —Pharaoh soon heard the news, and rejoicing with Joseph bade him provide wagons for his father's journey, and the brothers went off laden with provisions and gifts. They told Jacob, whose heart sank, for the news overpowered him—'too good to be true,' he thought. But the sight of the wagons revived him, and he said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.' Encouraged by God (vv. 2-4) he left Canaan with his household and descendants, sixty-six in number, and all he had, for Egypt. 'And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself to him' (v. 29). '**Presented himself.**' Both were greatly changed. The son Jacob bore in his memory was a youth of seventeen, clad in a many-coloured coat. Now stands before him a stalwart man clothed in white, wearing the ensigns of his office that gleamed and glittered in the sunshine—the ruler of all Egypt, yet his own boy—**Rachel's son and his son—Joseph.** And the father who lived in the son's love was to his memory still a vigorous man. But years and sorrow had done their work on him, and now Joseph sees a father bent under life's burden. And need we wonder as we read that 'he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while'?

For seventeen years longer Jacob was spared. Joseph had arranged that his father and brethren should live at Goshen, and there the old man passed a pleasant eventide, comforted by visits from Joseph and his children, and by the presence around him of all he loved.

LESSONS

God overrules all. God honours those that honour Him. We should not render evil for evil, but forgive as we hope to be forgiven. Joseph was not ashamed of his poor brothers; he kissed them all. Jesus is not ashamed to call penitent sinners brethren.

XII.—THE EARLY LIFE OF MOSES

Exod. i. 8-14, 22; ii.

Introduction.—Last lesson showed us Joseph still ruling Egypt, and Jacob and his descendants peacefully settled in Goshen. The king held the governor in high esteem, and the Israelites increased in numbers and in wealth. But time went on; Pharaoh and Jacob and Joseph died. Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. xxiii.) Joseph knew that God meant to bring His people out from Egypt, and by faith he gave commandment concerning his bones (Heb. xi. 24), making the children of Israel swear that they would carry them to the land whither God had promised to lead them (Gen. xlix. 25; Exod. xiii. 19; Joshua xxiv. 32).

I. **The Cruel King** (Exod. i. 8-14).—A new 'Pharaoh,' as Egyptian kings were always named, now came into power and Joseph's services were forgotten. The Egyptians were exposed to attacks from the east and north-east, and when a king arose that 'knew not Joseph,' it seemed to him a dangerous thing that a people, not Egyptians, who might at any time take part with their enemies, should be allowed to increase in numbers and strength upon their most exposed frontier. Accordingly the Israelites were set to build treasure cities, and tasked so that their lives were bitter with hard bondage. But this did not keep down their numbers. The harder they were worked the more numerous they grew. So stronger steps were taken. The king ordered that whenever a Hebrew baby boy was born he should be cast into the Nile; if the baby was a girl she might be spared, for the Egyptians were not afraid that women would become soldiers.

II. **The believing Mother and obedient Daughter** (Exod. ii. 1-4).—While this cruel law was in force it happened that a boy was born in the home of an Israelite called Amram. He and Jochebed, his wife, had already two children, Aaron and Miriam. The babe must have been a very beautiful child, for we are told he was 'a goodly child,' 'exceeding fair' (Acts vii. 20), 'a proper child' (Heb. xi. 23). The parents loved their little boy, and were in terror lest the king's officers should find him and drown him in the river. So they hid him three months. But it is not easy to hide a baby who has not sense to be quiet when danger is near, and the report got out that there was a child in Amram's house. The mother knew she could no longer hide him, but she believed in God and 'was not afraid of the king's commandment.' She knew that God was greater than Pharaoh and could save her boy. So she made a little ark or basket of bulrushes and 'daubed it with slime and with pitch,' which made the little vessel watertight, and 'laid it in the flags or reeds, by the river's brink.' She left her daughter Miriam to watch from a distance what would happen.

III. **The Compassionate Princess** (vv. 5-11).—By and by the king's daughter came down to the river to bathe, and she saw the ark among the flags, and wondering what it was, 'she sent her maid to fetch it.' Moses' mother no doubt knew that the great Egyptian lady often came here to bathe, and chose this place for that reason. [On one of the monuments

there is a picture of such a scene. A noble lady is represented bathing in the river with four maidens in attendance upon her.] Pharaoh's daughter opened the basket 'and saw the child; and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.' A weeping babe, 'exceeding fair,' touched her heart, and while she was thinking what she would do, and perhaps soothing the crying child in her arms, Miriam, who had been watching, came up and offered to fetch 'a nurse of the Hebrew women.' To this offer Pharaoh's daughter at once agreed, saying, 'Go,' and Miriam quickly returned with Jochebed, who was charged to nurse the child, her own babe, and was promised wages for what she was glad to do for love. No one would dare now to harm the boy, for Pharaoh's daughter had taken him in charge

IV. **The Baby who became a Great Man** (vv. 10-23).—Moses grew and was brought after a time to Pharaoh's daughter, who called him Moses, and he became her son. It is thought that she had no son of her own, and that if he had been willing to live as an Egyptian he might have become king. At all events he was taken to court and became one of the royal household.

Learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.—Moses made great progress in learning, and grew up a strong and clever youth (Acts vii. 22). The Egyptians were idolaters, but Moses was taught by his God-fearing mother, so that while he became learned in the wisdom of Egypt he did not worship its gods. Moses lived for forty years at Pharaoh's court. No doubt he loved the princess who had been so kind to him, but he knew that he was a Hebrew, and he felt greatly for his countrymen, who were still slaves, oppressed by hard laws and cruel taskmasters.

Taking part with his countrymen.—One day he went out and saw a Hebrew scourged by an Egyptian, and thinking no one saw him, he killed the Egyptian and hid his body. Tell what happened after this. Moses was not perfect any more than Joseph. He ought not to have killed the Egyptian, and so far from helping the Hebrews, his rash act hindered and delayed their deliverance. We are told (Heb. xi. 24-27) that '**by faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.**' He might have been a great warrior, or a great statesman, or have taken his fill of foolish indulgence, but he knew that these things would last for a season only, and he desired something that would last for ever. So he chose to become a friend of slaves, and to be misunderstood and rejected even by them, rather than live in Pharaoh's palace enjoying the pleasures of sin; and surely when he came from the better country, where he is now, to be with Christ upon the mountain (Matt. xvii. 3), he must have been glad that he had made such a choice.

Prepared in the desert for leadership.—Pharaoh heard that Moses had killed the Egyptian, and to escape the wrath of the king he fled to Midian. Here he got his wife. Tell the story. For forty years he led a quiet shepherd life, leading his flocks through the wilderness with which his history is now so closely associated. While he lived in Midian Pharaoh died, but his death brought no relief to the poor Hebrews. God, however, had not forgotten them or His covenant with their fathers. **Their cry came up**

unto God (v. 23), and while their cry was rising up to Him in Egypt, He was preparing Moses in Midian to lead them in His own time out of the house of bondage.

LESSONS

1. God always finds and fits men to be leaders. When Joseph departs, Moses appears.

2. Pharaoh thought that by putting Hebrew boys to death in the Nile, he would preserve his power, but from the Nile God sent a child into his house, and prepared him there to humble the pride of Egypt.

3. Trust in God is a better security than human wisdom.

4. God hears the cry of the oppressed, and will in His own time deliver those who cast themselves upon Him.

TO THE TEACHER

The teacher may find it interesting to tell the children that in the Bûlâq Museum in Cairo there are many mummies of Pharaohs, and among them that of Rameses II., who is believed to be the king that knew not Joseph and oppressed the Israelites. The dry air and equal temperature of Egypt have preserved his features and form, and visitors see in the face one whose hand 3500 years ago grasped that of Moses. His body is tall, his chest broad, his head long but small for his frame, the hair white at death, but rendered yellow by embalming; a light moustache and short beard are still seen, grown probably during his last illness, and an expression of dignity marks the countenance. For an excellent account of the discovery of the mummy of Rameses II., see *The Century Magazine*, May 1887; and for the historical setting of the 'Pharaoh of the Oppression' and the 'Pharaoh of the Exodus' see *The Story of the Nations: Ancient Egypt*, chapters xv. and xvi.

XIII.—GOD SENDS MOSES TO DELIVER THE ISRAELITES

Exod. iii., iv. 1-17

Introduction.—Moses had been forty years at the Egyptian court and other forty years with Reuel in Midian. He was still strong, quick-sighted, and active, for when he died forty years afterwards 'his eye was not dim, or his natural force abated' (Deut. xxxiv. 7). He had no doubt heard from time to time that the Pharaoh who sought to kill him still governed Egypt and oppressed the Hebrews, but he could not go to visit his countrymen, for his life would have been taken. Now Pharaoh was dead. God had made Egypt ready for his return, and was about to call him from his peaceable home to the hard duty of braving the new king, demanding that he should let his countrymen go, and leading them forth that they might enter and possess the land promised to their fathers. One day he had led the flock of Jethro his father-in-law to the southern part of the peninsula of Sinai, where amid a great mass of peaks, the highest rising 9000 feet, of dark green porphyry and red granite, cut up here and there by valleys or glens, are found green spots to which the Bedouin still drive their flocks in summer. Here is Sinai, the mount of God, awful in its still, solitary grandeur. Here a wonderful thing happened him.

I. **A faithful God** (Exod. iii. 1-10).—On a crag where grew a tree of the thorny acacia, which abounds in the wadies or glens, there spread all around the tree a wrapping of fire, but the flame seemed not to possess its ordinary power, for 'the bush was not consumed.' After gazing from a distance Moses turned aside to take a closer view of 'this great sight.' Then a voice came to him out of the midst of the bush. The speaker was the Angel of Jehovah, who is also called 'Jehovah' and 'God,' and who is no other than the Son of God. He first told Moses to put his shoes from off his feet, for he was standing on ground made holy by God's presence. [This is the Oriental manner of expressing reverence—as we take off our hats before we enter the house of God, the Eastern worshipper takes off his shoes.] Then He told Moses that He was the same Angel of the Covenant as had appeared to his fathers—the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. Moses was alarmed. When a man feels that God is beside him, he is convicted of sin, and like Moses at Sinai, is afraid to look upon God, or is appalled like Peter when he said to Jesus, 'Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Moses need not have been afraid. God had come down in mercy not in anger, and the light of the bush was not a consuming fire. He told Moses that He had seen the afflictions of His people, had heard their cry and knew their sorrows, and that now He was about to deliver them from their oppressors and bring them to a good land, flowing with milk and honey. He also charged him to go to Pharaoh and tell him that he was about to lead Israel out of Egypt.

II. **An unwilling Messenger** (vv. 11-22).—Moses was not willing to do what God called him to perform. **His first difficulty was as to his own fitness.** It is right to be humble, but true humility is bold, because it rests on God. Moses thought too much of himself and too little of

Jehovah when he said, 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?' God was patient with Moses, and said, 'Certainly I will be with thee,' and as a token He told him that when his work in Egypt was done, he and all the Israelites should come there and serve God upon that mountain. This promise was given at once to prove and to increase his faith.

His next difficulty was as to the name by which he should speak of God to the Israelites. He expected that they would think he came of himself, and not believe when he said God had sent him. One of the two Hebrews whom he once tried to reconcile had asked, 'Who made thee a judge?' and others would meet him in the same spirit. What was he to say to them? God told him to explain to them the meaning of **the name Jehovah**, by which He had made Himself known to Abraham (Gen. xv. 7). It was, '**I am that I am**,' the **faithful, eternal,** and **unchangeable** God. He was to say 'I am hath sent me'; and to remove all doubt he was to add, 'The God of your fathers, of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath sent me unto you.' This, God told him, was the name by which He was to be known for ever. Moses was to go to Egypt, to gather the elders of the people together and tell them Jehovah had looked upon them, and, taking up Joseph's words of prophecy (Gen. l. 24), had visited them, and would deliver them and bring them to Canaan. God told him that Israel would hearken to his voice, and that he and the elders must go to Pharaoh and tell him that their God had met with them, and that they desired to go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Him. He told Moses too that Pharaoh would refuse even when God's strong hand was upon him, but that at the last, after suffering great affliction, his stubborn heart would yield and he would let them go. And then God would make the Egyptians so desire their departure that they would leave like conquerors laden with spoil, carrying with them gold and silver, jewels, and precious raiment.

III. **A great Commission** (Exod. iv. 1-17).—Moses still hesitated. 'Behold,' he said, 'they will not believe me.' God had told him they would believe, and Moses should have taken God's word. It was very gracious of God to be patient with his unbelief. God gave him three signs or tokens by which he should be enabled to prove that he did not go to the Hebrews in his own name.

1. He bade Moses cast upon the ground his shepherd's staff, and immediately it became a serpent, before which Moses fled. Then God bade him take it by the tail, and when he did so it became a staff as at first. This miracle had a meaning which Moses would understand. [Just as the British Lion is the symbol of our country's authority, the serpent was the symbol of royal power in Egypt.] Moses was thus taught that he should receive power to overcome the king and the gods of Egypt.

2. The second sign was a lesson, not for Pharaoh, but for Israel. God told Moses to put his hand into his bosom, and when he drew it out it was leprous—white as snow; then he was told to put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out, it was well. This miracle was to teach the Israelites that God is able to inflict and to remove judgments, and that, as His servant, Moses was to receive power to punish or heal as they resisted or obeyed his commands.

3. If they refused to be convinced by these signs he was to show another sign and to pour Nile water on the land and it would become blood. This would show to Israel and Egypt alike that Moses came in the power of Jehovah, for the Nile on which the harvest depended was worshipped by the Egyptians, and when its pure waters were changed into polluting blood there was proof that Egypt and its gods were powerless before the God of Moses.

Moses had still another difficulty. He was not eloquent; he had never been a ready speaker, and even now in God's presence he had difficulty in saying what he meant. His quiet life in Midian had kept him from public life, and he would not be able by words of fiery power to reach hearts and kindle patriotic feeling. Then God, still patient, told him that He who made man's mouth would make him eloquent and give him words. Once more Moses objected. His difficulties had one by one been met, but he still resisted God's call, and asked that some other messenger should be found. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses. Yet he had pity on his weak faith, and told him that even while He spoke, his brother Aaron, who could speak well, was on the way to meet him, and that to him would be given the duty of being a speaker to the people.

The two brothers, who had probably been separated for many years, were about to have a joyful meeting, and afterwards to work together for Israel's deliverance. Moses was to be the mediator through whom God would instruct Aaron what he was to say to Israel. Then God told Moses to begin his work at once, and to take his rod in his hand as an emblem of authority and an instrument for working signs. **The staff of Moses became the rod of God.** 'And Moses went.'

LESSONS

1. Moses was being prepared for his work in Midian as in Egypt. If we would serve God we must have quiet hours as well as busy ones (Matt. vi. 6).

2. Want of influence, or talent, or eloquence, or experience, will not serve as an excuse for not serving God. Man admires eloquent speech, God requires faithful work.

XIV.—THE PASSOVER

Exod. xii. 1-30 (compare 1 Cor. v. 7, 8)

Introduction.—The last night of Israel in Egypt was a very memorable one. It was 'a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt' (v. 42). It was four hundred and thirty years since Jacob had gone down from Caanan to Joseph, and now his children had become a great multitude. Their last years in Egypt had been times of hard trial. They had been treated as slaves, had been burdened with labour, their little ones had been cruelly murdered, and they had sighed and cried by reason of their afflictions. But their slavery was about to end, and they were to be led out into liberty and settled homes. God had by nine terrible plagues humbled Pharaoh and his people, and as, in spite of all, he still refused to let Israel go, a tenth plague was to be sent, the most dreadful of all, which should make him not only willing but eager for their departure.

I. **The Passover** (vv. 1-11).—Moses was commanded to summon the children of Israel and bid them make ready for a festival, which should for ever be connected with their deliverance. It was to be called the Passover, because on that night God was to pass through the land of Egypt and smite all the first-born, both man and beast. On the houses of the Israelites, however, there was to be a **sign** or token which would keep safe all who were within. When the sign was there, the destroyer would not enter; if it were absent, Death would do his work. That **sign** was **blood sprinkled on the two side posts** and **the upper door-post of the house.** As the destroyer was to pass over the houses whose doors were blood-besprinkled, the festival was called the Passover, and the lamb from which the blood was taken was called the Passover lamb. The day of deliverance was to be the fourteenth of the month Abib. On the tenth day of the month, every head of a household was to take a lamb, or if his family was small and could not eat a whole lamb, two neighbours might join in the work of preparation. The lamb was to be without blemish, a male not more than a year old, and it was to be kept in the house until the fourteenth day of the month. On the evening of that day it was to be killed, and the blood to be sprinkled on the door-posts. Then the flesh, unlike that of the victims of idolatrous sacrifice, which was eaten raw, was to be roasted whole and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and the bones and any portions that remained were to be burned. While the people were eating, they were to be dressed, not as at ordinary meals, but as people ready to set out in a moment on a journey; their long robes were to be gathered up with a girdle, they were to have staves in their hands and shoes on their feet, and they were to eat in haste, so as to be ready on a sudden summons. **On that night the people were to be together.** They must not be scattered among the Egyptians, but in their own homes, for then, as before, the promise was to be fulfilled to Israel which had been spoken to Pharaoh, 'I will put a division between My people and thy people' (viii. 23); 'I will sever in that day the land of Goshen in which My people dwell' (viii. 22).

II. **The marks of Separation and Safety** (vv. 12-28).—The great mark set on Israel that separated them from the Egyptians was **the blood upon the door-posts.** That they were in Goshen, that they were in their own houses, would not save them unless the door-posts had been sprinkled. **'When I see the blood, I will pass over you, when I smite the land of Egypt'** (v. 13). Picture the people, old and young, within their houses on that night of judgment. Terrible as was the doom threatened upon the Egyptians, and awful as was the thought of losing the first-born, the families of Israel were safe from the destroying angel within the blood-sprinkled doors. The first-born child himself would feel safe—brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, would know that their loved one was safe. So there is safety for us from the wrath and curse of God in the blood of Jesus, when by faith we make Him our Friend and Shelter. What does the hymn say?

> 'Believing we rejoice
> To see the curse remove;
> We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
> And sing His dying love.'

Besides the blood there was **the absence of leaven.** At the first Passover, and at every Passover, leaven was for seven days put out of the houses of Israel. Leaven is used in Scripture as a type of evil, and those who love the Lord must hate evil, and put it away from them. When St. Paul calls Christ 'our Passover, sacrificed for us,' he also bids us keep the Lord's Supper, 'not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Cor. v. 7, 8).

By the blood of Christ's sacrifice His people are separated from the ungodly, and they show that they are Christ's by hating and forsaking evil. Israel at the Passover is a picture of what Christians should be,—a people redeemed with blood, separated from the world, feeding on the Lamb of God, leaning on the staff of God's promises, showing in their daily life that they are pilgrims and strangers on earth, and that they are ready to depart and be with Christ in a better country.

III. **The Smiting of the First-born in the Land of Egypt** (vv. 29, 30).—That night God smote the first-born of the Egyptians. Pharaoh and all the Egyptians rose at midnight and there was a great cry, for the first-born in every house was dead. In Eastern countries people when in sorrow make noisy lamentations. [Some years ago when the plague was in Cairo, at night, when the air was still, the wail of the city could be heard for miles away.] It was a cry 'such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more' (xi. 6). 'For there was not a house where there was not one dead' (v. 30). There was no exception; in palace, in hovel, in the house, in the field, even in the prison, the first-born died. 'At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle' (v. 29). In some houses there would be more than one dead, where father and son and perhaps grandson were first-born. Even the son of the poor maidservant behind the mill was taken. Children and old men died together, and camels, horses, oxen, sheep lay dead on every side. No wonder that there was a great cry.

We see in this judgment how God punishes sinners, causing them to reap what they have sowed. For years there had been a great cry in Egypt. 'The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried' (ii. 23). Pharaoh and his people had no pity for the weeping Hebrews, but Jehovah heard their cry and made Egypt cry in turn. 'Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard' (Prov. xxi. 13). Pharaoh had caused the little ones of Israel to be cast into the river, and he and his people are themselves made to feel the pangs of parents deprived of their children by sudden death. Pharaoh had been the leader in oppressing the Israelites, but the people had been like him and suffered along with him. There are degrees in guilt, but all are under sin, and the wages of sin is death.

IV. **The Memorial** (vv. 24-27).—The Passover Feast held year by year in Israel kept alive the remembrance of that night of judgment and deliverance. When it was being kept in after-years, at a particular point of the observance one of the children asked, '**What mean ye by this service?**' And the answer given was, '**It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.**' And just as the Jews kept the Passover as a memorial till the Lamb of God came to deliver from the bondage of sin, so we keep the Lord's Supper as our memorial of His death till He shall come again in power and great glory. Remember this when you see the Communion observed, and some day you will have the privilege of taking part in that gracious memorial yourselves.

LESSONS

1. We are saved, not by anything we are or can do, but by Christ our Passover sacrificed for us.

2. Nothing but blood kept Israel safe, and nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanseth us from all sin, and delivers us from the wrath and curse of God.

XV.—THE PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA

Exod. xiv.

Introduction.—On the night of the Passover the angel of the Lord went through the land and smote all the first-born of the Egyptians. Terrified by this last and most dreadful plague, Pharaoh sent in haste for Moses and Aaron and told them he was now perfectly willing to let Israel go. He implored them to depart with the utmost speed, and made no conditions with them, asking only that instead of the curse they would leave a blessing behind them (xii. 32). 'And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people that they might send them out of the land in haste, for they said, We be all dead men.' So in the cool and darkness of the night six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, who were all ready—their loins girded, their feet sandalled, and staves in their hands—set out from Rameses. They carried with them Joseph's bones (xiii. 19), concerning which he had given commandment (Heb. xi. 22). In to-day's lesson we follow them, till we see them with the waters of the Red Sea between them and the house of bondage.

I. **Israel on the Way** (vv. 1-9).—Led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, they halted for their first night-quarters at Succoth, and for their second at Etham. At Etham they were on the edge of the wilderness. Before them were the Philistines, who would have opposed their passage, so they were directed to turn southward and march to 'Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea,' where they were to encamp. It is likely that from Etham, as they turned southward, tidings reached Pharaoh of this backward movement, which led him to think that the Israelites had 'entangled' themselves as in a net and would become an easy prey. It had been told him that they meant to leave Egypt for ever, and not simply to go for a few days to offer sacrifice; so he resolved to pursue them, expecting to find them completely shut in by the Red Sea, which then covered the Bitter Lakes, and by the mountains. He accordingly gathered his army, including 'six hundred chosen chariots,' each drawn by two spirited war-horses and carrying two men, one bearing the shield and driving, the other fully armed. Egypt was famed for its horses, and the army consisted largely of cavalry. There were probably about two millions of people, including women and children, in the camp of Israel, which would extend over many miles at Pihahiroth.

II. **Israel alarmed** (vv. 10-14).—The first intimation of danger seems to have been given by the appearance in the distance of the Egyptians. The people were greatly terrified, for they appeared to be enclosed as in a trap, without possibility of escape. Behind them on the north was Pharaoh's army, before them and on the west were mountains, and on the east was the Red Sea. However sinful in those for whom God had already done so great things, it was natural to think their case was desperate, and to murmur against Moses. Some of them were of a better spirit, and cried out unto the Lord, but most broke out into upbraiding complaints: 'Were there no graves in Egypt,' they asked, 'that Moses had brought them there to die?' Egypt is a land of tombs, full of cemeteries and memorials of the dead, so that the Israelites spoke these words in mockery of Moses, and they told him he had better

have left them slaves in Egypt than have brought them to be killed by Pharaoh's soldiers at Pihahiroth. Moses' faith did not fail. He bade the people be of good heart, and assured them that they were looking for the last time, that day, upon the Egyptian army which filled them with alarm, for God would fight for them, and their murmurs would be silenced by His deliverance.

III. **Escape provided** (vv. 15-22).—Moses does not tell us that he then cast himself before God in prayer, but he does tell us that God bade him rise from prayer. It is right to pray, and we should pray always; but there is a time to work, and we must not neglect work even for prayer. Christ bids us enter into our closet and shut the door and pray; but any one who should do this while there was work to be done by him that called for busy hands, would be acting wrongly. The Lord said unto Moses, 'Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward' (v. 15). And there was work for himself also. He was to go and stretch his rod over the sea before the command to march on should be given, that the waters might be divided and a dry passage prepared. Then the angel of God would go behind the host and cast the light of the pillar upon Israel's path, while with the darkness of the cloud he would conceal them from the view of their enemies, and Israel passing over the dry sea bottom would find safe footing, and in due season stand safely on the other side. Moses obeyed, and the angel passed to the rear of the host of Israel, casting light in front and causing darkness behind, and then the east wind blew and the waters were divided and stood up as a wall on this side and on that, so that the people passed between dryshod.

IV. **Egyptians punished** (vv. 23-31).—It was probably night when the Egyptians arrived at the sea-shore. They could not see what was going on in front, for the dark cloud was between them and the fiery pillar that gave Israel light for the way, so that the one body 'came not near the other all the night'; but as soon as the Egyptians discovered what had happened they pursued and went in after them in the midst of the sea. Then 'in the morning watch'—at sunrise, which in April is a little before six o'clock—'Jehovah looked unto them' through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and humbled the host of the Egyptians. This 'look' was perhaps the appearance of fire suddenly bursting forth from the pillar of cloud which was towards the Egyptians, its unearthly brilliance throwing them into confusion by a sudden panic. So great was the disorder that the chariots were brought into collision, the wheels were broken, and under the fiery glow the sands seemed to soften so that 'they drave them heavily.' Filled with fear and consternation, they recognised the presence of the power that had filled their land with plagues, and said, 'Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord doth fight for them' (v. 25). But it was too late. The Lord gave the word, and 'Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared'; and Jehovah hurled the Egyptians from their chariots in the midst of the sea (Ps. cxxxvi. 15). Not one escaped. The saying of Moses (v. 13) was fulfilled. 'The waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them' (v. 28).

This wonderful deliverance produced a great effect upon Israel—'they believed in Jehovah and His servant Moses' (v. 31). They were taught by the destruction of Pharaoh and his army that God will punish the ungodly, and by their own safety that He is the merciful Deliverer of His people. Throughout their national history the song of Moses commemorating their Red Sea deliverance (Exod. xv. 1-19) was sung at the close of each Sabbath morning service.

LESSONS

God's way is the right way and the best way, but it is not always a short way (Ps. cvii. 7). Through the Red Sea was God's way, and when the people went forward He made their way easy, and if we go forward boldly in the way the Bible directs and conscience approves we shall find that 'Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' The devil proposed to Christ that He should take a short way to gain the world (Luke iv. 5, 8), but Christ knew that it could only be safely won through the hard, painful way of Gethsemane and Calvary.

TO THE TEACHER

It is interesting to know that among the mummies of kings discovered near Thebes in 1881 (see Lesson XII.) were those of Seti I. and of Rameses II., the latter of whom is believed to have been the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph and who oppressed the Israelites, but the mummy of Menephthah, the successor of Rameses II., who is identified with the Pharaoh on whom the plagues were brought, was not found. The lesson would appear to give a sufficient reason for its absence.

XVI.—THE THUNDERS OF SINAI

Exod. xix. 1-9, 16-25; xx. 18-21 (compare Heb. xii. 18-29)

I. **The Scene** (Exod. xix. 1, 2).—In the third month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites came to the desert of Sinai and camped in the plain that stretches from the foot of the mountain at the north-eastern end. They had been marching through a wide valley between two steep ranges of granite rocks, and now their pillar guide summoned them to halt. God was about to set before them what He had done for them, and what He required them to be and to do. So He gathered them into the plain that He might speak to them from the mountain. It was a place remote from any human dwellings, where sometimes a shepherd led his flocks to pasture, but where usually no life was seen except that of the eagle soaring aloft, or of the beast of prey as he retreated to his mountain den. Sinai now looked down upon a great multitude of busy people. Far and near the tents of Israel were spread. The plain is high above the level of the sea, and as the people looked before them they saw standing out from the mountain range of Horeb a great shelf of rock, 'the nether part of the mount,' from which as from a gigantic pulpit the voice of the living God was heard.

II. **Preparation** (vv. 3-9).—Before Jehovah gave the law, careful preparations were made by Moses and the people. As the tents were being fixed, Moses went up the mountain. He knew it well, for he had sometimes led Jethro's flocks to pasture around it, and here out of the burning bush God had called him, and given him the promise that was now being fulfilled (iii. 12). He seems to have gone up to be instructed by God, and as he was ascending the Divine voice addressed him.

God spoke to Moses very tenderly of the Israelites, calling them 'the house of Jacob' and 'the children of Israel,' thus reminding them that He had long before promised to be the God of Jacob's children. He had not forgotten His promises, and had already fulfilled some of them. **'Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself.'** [The figure is very interesting and full of instruction. The old eagles are said to 'stir up' their young in the nest to make them learn to fly. Then, when the eaglet grows weary or terrified, the old one flies beneath it, and bears it up on its own strong back or pinions, and so teaches it trust and confidence. Thus the eagle comes between its young and all attacks; the dart before it can touch the eaglet must first pass through the body of the parent bird. As the eagle thus protects her young God protects His people (Zech. ii. 8). Setting the cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians He had borne them as on eagles' wings across the Red Sea, and into the wilderness.] And He told Moses that He would do much more for the people if they would obey His voice, and keep His covenant. They would in this case be His peculiar treasure, they would be more precious to Him and more favoured by Him than any other people, though He was not their God only, but the God of all nations, 'for all the earth is Mine.' They would also be a kingdom of priests, each Israelite having liberty to approach Him, and a holy nation, set apart by and especially consecrated to Him.

Having received these words, Moses went down and told them to the people, who readily promised to obey Jehovah, and then he returned to Jehovah, reported the people's decision, and received a promise that on the third day God would come down upon Mount Sinai in the presence of all the people. Meantime they were to make ready by sanctifying themselves to meet with God, and bounds or fences were to be set around the mount that no living thing might approach the place to which God was to come down. Any one who trespassed was to be put to death.

III. **The Terrors of the Law** (vv. 16-25; xx. 18-21).—The third day came. As the morning broke, any who were asleep in their tents were aroused by terrific peals of thunder, and as they rose deafened by the sound, their eyes were dazzled by lightning flashes which in quick succession darted from the heavens, and cast an unearthly glare on earth and sky. The thunder awoke the echoes from the rocks and it seemed as if the overhanging mountains, starting from their foundations, were about to bury the tents of Israel under their tottering and falling masses. Between the thunder peals there was heard the sound waxing louder and louder of the trumpet which was the signal for the people to leave their tents. Fear was in every heart, and dismay on every face. 'All the people that were in the camp trembled.' Sinai seemed to be on fire, 'because Jehovah descended on it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.' In the midst of this awful scene 'Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.' What Moses said we are told in Heb. xii. 21, 'I exceedingly fear and quake.' He was summoned to go to the top of the mount and obeyed. Here he received a charge to bid the people keep back from the mountain, and not attempt to come into the presence of Jehovah. Even the priests were to sanctify themselves lest Jehovah should dash them to pieces. This command was meant to teach not only the holiness of God, but the sinfulness of man. Moses and Aaron might ascend the mount, for God had chosen them to act as mediators between Him and Israel, but all others were strictly forbidden until after the signal (xix. 13) should have been given.

Then God's voice was heard. He claimed to be the God who had brought Israel out of Egypt, who had a right to give laws which all are bound to obey, and He laid down in ten commandments the sum of man's duty to God and to his fellow-men. These commandments are always and everywhere binding. It is as much our duty to keep them now as it was Israel's duty when they were given. While God was speaking, the thunder and lightning continued to peal and flash, the trumpet sounded, the mountain smoked, and it must have seemed as if the last day had come and judgment was begun. Thunder, lightning, earthquakes strike fear into men's hearts whenever they visit districts, and it is no wonder that the people 'removed and stood afar off' from the mount where God was, and from which these terrible sounds and sights proceeded. Though Moses encouraged them, they would not draw nigh, but entreated him to speak for them, and hear for them what God desired them to do. To him they would listen, but they were afraid of death if they went into Jehovah's immediate presence. So they were allowed to stand afar off, at their tent doors (Deut. v. 30), and then Moses and Aaron (xxiv. 18) went into the thick darkness where God was.

IV. **The Blessings of the Gospel** (Heb. xii. 18-29).—In the Epistle to the Hebrews the scene at the giving of the law from Sinai is described, and Christians are shown how much nearer to God they are under the Gospel than the Israelites were at Sinai. We do not need to be afraid to draw nigh unto God. We are not come to a mount towards which we have to grope amid thick darkness. Christ by His death for our sins has brought us to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, with Whom is the fountain of life. The effect which the law produced was alarm, and when it was given even Moses exceedingly feared and quaked. Thunder crashed, and lightning with its appalling terrors threatened death to all who drew near to the terrible desert mountain. Blackness, darkness, and tempest surrounded it, and a voice that was heard above all other sounds so alarmed the people that they entreated it should cease, because they feared they should die under its overpowering claims. But having fulfilled the law for us, Christ sets us free from its terrors. No thunders peal, no lightnings flash, around Mount Zion. We have boldness to draw nigh, and we approach by a new and living way. **On Sinai God clothed Himself with robes of terror, but on Zion He appears as the Son of man, the Lord our righteousness.** There is a rainbow round about the throne. We are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, whose blood of sprinkling marks us as His own, and does for us what the blood of bulls and goats sprinkled by Aaron or by Moses could only do figuratively, purging us from guilt and commending us to God. Through Him we are come to God the Judge of all, and to the angels and the company of the redeemed in glory.

But because we owe so much to Christ we are called to hear, reverence, and obey God more fully than those could do who were under the law. And if they did not escape, who in the days of old refused Moses who spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Christ Who speaks to us from heaven. Under the Gospel, no less than under the law, 'our God is a consuming fire.'

LESSONS

1. **The law gives knowledge of sin, but cannot give deliverance from its guilt and power.** It is not enough to know what God requires. We are under condemnation, and the law shows our need of a Saviour to set us free from guilt and give us power to render new obedience.

2. When we hear and receive Jesus, God is our reconciled Father and comes to us in love and with blessing. '**The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ**' (John i. 17).

XVII.—THE DAY OF ATONEMENT AND YEAR OF JUBILEE

Lev. xvi., xxv. 8-17 (compare Heb. ix.)

Introduction.—The great day of the year in Israel was the Day of Atonement. It was observed with humiliation, and was the only day on which fasting was commanded. It was set apart as the day on which atonement was to be made for the sins and uncleanness of priests and people (vv. 16-34; xxiii. 26-32), and for the purging of the tabernacle and its contents. God's presence was manifested in the most holy place, within the veil of the tabernacle, and into that place Aaron as the high priest, and no other, was to enter on this day only in the year. The proceedings of the Day of Atonement were full of Gospel significance and typical of the ministration of the Great High Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ (Heb. ix.)

The year of Jubilee was another great Jewish institution. It came round only once in fifty years. From the beginning of the world, one day—the seventh—had been set apart for rest and worship. On this as a foundation rested a series of what may be called Sabbatic institutions. Seven was regarded as a sacred number, and was connected in the Jewish mind with the idea of completeness. As the seventh day was the Sabbath day, so the seventh month was the Sabbath month, the seventh year the Sabbath year, and at the close of the year in which seven times seven years were completed the year of Jubilee was proclaimed. Each of these Sabbatic institutions was connected with special observances. As man had his rest every seventh day the land was to have its Sabbath every seventh year, and after a Sabbath period of years, all land that had been sold returned to its original owners and liberty was restored to all who were in bondage.

I. **The Day of Atonement—Sacrifice and Blood-Sprinkling.**—It was only once a year on the Day of Atonement that the high priest was to enter into the holy place of the tabernacle,—the most holy place—the holy of holies—where the symbol of the Divine Presence rested between the cherubim over the mercy-seat. 'I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat' (Lev. xvi. 2). We need not wonder to find minute instructions given for such a solemn approach. Notice the various points in the solemn ceremonial.

1. **The high priest's dress** (Lev. xvi. 4).—[Name the pieces.] These were emblems of purity (compare Rev. vii. 13; xix. 8). The dress of white linen was a special one, and different from the official dress of the ordinary priest, which was fastened with a girdle of four colours. And the high priest must wash before he enters.

2. **The sacrifice for the priesthood** (vv. 3, 6, 11-14).—He must enter into God's presence, 'not without blood' (Heb. ix. 7). Before he proceeds to enter the holy of holies, he is to bring a bullock for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering. [Note the parts of this ceremony.] The most important point is to observe that the high priest takes the blood of the slain bullock, and with his finger sprinkles it seven times upon the mercy-seat, and then seven times upon the floor in front. By this offering he atoned for

the sins of himself and the whole priestly house. [Our Great High Priest needed no such sacrifice to put away sin (Heb. vii. 26, 27).]

3. **The sacrifice for the people** (vv. 15-19).—Two goats were provided by the people for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering. One of the goats, chosen by lot, was killed, and its blood sprinkled as before upon the mercy-seat. Both the holy place and the tabernacle were cleansed from the sinfulness of priests and people. Even the altar is cleansed by the blood. In all this the high priest was quite alone, and is thus a type of the One Mediator between God and man.

II. **The Scapegoat** (vv. 20-22).—The first part of the high priest's work was now over; he had sprinkled the holy of holies, the tabernacle, and the altar. The goat for the Lord had been sacrificed, the live goat has now to be dealt with. It needed the two goats to be a type of Christ. One died to symbolise His death, the other was kept alive to symbolise His resurrection and His power to bear away His people's sins.

(1) *The high priest puts both his hands upon the victim*—not one hand only, as in ordinary sacrifices, but *both*, to give solemnity and meaning to the act. (2) *Then he confesses over him the people's sins.* The offerer of the ordinary sacrifice made confession of sin when placing his hand on the victim. The high priest acted as the representative of the people and confessed their sins. **He was thus putting them upon the head of the goat.** The sins of the nation were in symbol laid upon the goat and carried by him into the wilderness. The first goat was a figure of atonement for sin by blood-shedding, the second of the taking away of sin and its punishment (Isa. liii. 6).

III. **The Closing Rites** (vv. 23-34).—The particular services of the day were now ended and the atonement garments were to be laid up in the tabernacle. The chief thing that now remained was for the high priest to offer up the ram of his burnt-offering and the ram of the people's burnt-offering (vv. 3, 5). This he does in his glorious robes as high priest, and as a token of thankfulness and praise for this new experience of God's mercy and forgiveness.

The tenth day of the seventh month was to be observed as the Day of Atonement in all time to come. It was to be a day of perfect rest and a day of fasting throughout all the land. '**This shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year**' (v. 34).

IV. **The Jubilee** (Lev. xxv. 8-17).—We are well accustomed now to the idea of a Jubilee—as denoting fifty years of a reign, married life, and the like. As noticed above (see Introduction), it was a year of rest and rejoicing. But notice **how it was ushered in. It always began on the evening of the Day of Atonement.** What a beautiful propriety there was in this! There was, first, a full display of God's mercy and forgiveness towards the people by the solemn ceremonies of the day, and then with thankful hearts the people could hear the great trumpet blow, which proclaimed that the Jubilee had begun. Note the blessings of the year of Jubilee.

1. **Liberty.**—All bondservants were now to be released. Even those who in the seventh year had refused liberty (Exod. xxi. 2, 6) were

with their wives and children to be set free. The reason is given (vv. 42, 55). The Jubilee was a figure of the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free (Isa. lxi. 1, 2). On the evening of the Great Day of Atonement, when Christ said 'It is finished,' the true Year of Jubilee for man began.

2. **Rest.**—The land was to rest for two years, the seventh Sabbatic year and the year of Jubilee. The rest would afford time for the changes made necessary by the release of bondsmen and restoration of possessions. There was no fear of famine whilst the land had its rest, for unusual productiveness was promised in the sixth year (v. 21), so that in that year's harvest enough would be provided for three years.

3. **Possessions restored.**—Land could be sold only for a lease of years. It belonged to Jehovah, and He had not given the right to part with it for ever. The value of land was greater or less viewed in the light of sale, as the year of Jubilee was near or distant. It was estimated by the number of crops which the purchaser would obtain. The Jubilee year reminded them that the land belonged to God, to whom they owed allegiance and obedience.

LESSONS

1. The need of a priest to stand between us and God; the high priest alone could enter into the holy of holies, **Christ alone can mediate for us.** The need of blood to make atonement. Not enough to lay hands on goat, confess sin over it, and send it away. One goat must first be slain and the blood carried in before God. Blood must be sprinkled before the live goat could carry away sin. When God forgives, He takes away our sin and remembers it no more for ever.

2. By the trumpet of Jubilee being sounded on the Day of Atonement, we are taught that the full atonement of Jesus is the foundation of all Gospel blessings.

TO THE TEACHER

The teacher should, before taking up the Day of Atonement in class, study the structure of the tabernacle, and be familiar with its furniture and with the arrangements for sacrifice. The manner in which the lessons illustrate the way of salvation should be kept steadily in view.

XVIII.—THE BRAZEN SERPENT

Num. xxi. 4-9 (compare John iii. 14-16)

THIRTY-SEVEN years had gone since the laws about the Atonement and the year of Jubilee were given. The last year of wilderness journeying had begun. The people had for the second time left Kadesh and were again advancing to the land of promise. Great changes have taken place. The generation, doomed to perish in the desert because of their rebellion and murmuring, has mostly passed away. The command to move northward gives fresh life to the new generation. The southern border of the land Israel is to possess is not far off, and the people desire to pass into it by the shortest line of march.

I. **Troubles and Murmurs.**—Unlooked-for trials disappoint the eager travellers.

1. *An enemy in the path.*—A Canaanitish king, that ruled over a district whose chief town was named Arad, heard that Israel was advancing by the way the spies had gone thirty-seven years before to search the land (xiii. 21), and he resolved to give them battle. The spies had entered Canaan through the wilderness of Zin, northward, and the king of Arad supposed that the Israelites meant to follow the same route and enter Canaan from the south. In his attempt to drive them back he was so far successful that he took some of them prisoners. Then, conscious of their weakness in themselves, they turned to God and asked strength for victory, vowing that if Arad were delivered into their hand they would *devote* the cities and the spoils (Lev. xxvii. 28, 29), not keeping anything for themselves but carrying out God's sentence of destruction. Their prayer was heard, the cities of Arad were delivered to them, and the Israelites *devoted* them, and called the place Hormah ('devoted to destruction').

2. *A wearisome journey.*—The Israelites left at once and journeyed from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea. The Edomites, Esau's descendants, had harshly refused to let them pass through their country (xx. 20), and as God had forbidden them to attack Edom, they were obliged to travel by a long round down the Arabah towards the Red Sea until they should pass the southern border of Edom and come up on the eastern side. The people were greatly discouraged by the difficulties of their journey, through desolate forbidding and depressing regions, and as their fathers often did when disappointed, so they began to speak against God and against Moses, making little of their mercies and much of their troubles. Had they been brought out of Egypt to die of hunger and thirst in a desolate wilderness, where they had no bread and no water, or only such as was loathsome to them (Ps. lxxviii. 19; Exod. xvi. 3; xvii. 3)? 'No bread!' though God had daily given them bread from heaven for nearly forty years; 'No water!' though day by day it had gushed from the flinty rocks! We wonder at their ingratitude, but do we ourselves never murmur or speak slightingly of our blessings, or think God unkind when trials come to us?

II. **Punishment and Penitence.**—God does not suffer sin to go unpunished. He 'sent fiery serpents among the people; and they bit the

people, and much people of Israel died.' The serpents are called fiery, either from their colour or from the burning pain caused by their deadly bite. [The serpents found in the Arabah are marked with fiery red spots and are poisonous. Their bite produces a pain like that of burning (Deut. viii. 15; Isa. xiv. 29; xxx. 6).] They probably abounded in this portion of the desert, for poisonous snakes are found in some parts of the peninsula of Sinai (Deut. viii. 15). [When Alexander the Great marched through Gedrosia, serpents sprang upon his soldiers from among the brushwood or the sandhills, and many of them were bitten and died.]

This terrible punishment made the people penitent, and they begged Moses to ask God to take away the serpents. 'And Moses prayed for the people.' Nothing brings ungrateful sinners to feel the sinfulness of sin, the need of God, and the value of prayer, like suffering and sorrow (Ps. lxxviii. 34). ['It were pity men should be without affliction since it sends them to their prayers and confessions' (Hall).]

III. **Pardon and Healing.**—God answered Moses' prayer. He was told to make a serpent of brass. The colour of this metal, or of copper, as it more likely was, when the sun shone on it would resemble that of the fiery serpent. The brazen serpent was then set upon a pole, or banner-staff, or standard, so that all who desired might see it from any part of the camp, and God promised that every bitten man who looked should be restored to health. Moses obeyed and the promise was fulfilled. Those who looked knew that the power to heal the wounded was not in the image, but came from God. The brass had no virtue except what God gave to it, so when they looked, the sick Israelites not only showed that they desired healing, but that they had faith in God and in the means He had appointed. **The looking** here required for a cure was not merely seeing, but earnestly turning the eyes towards the uplifted serpent. And when it is said that those who **looked lived**, it means that they continued to live, however sorely they had been bitten, and however near to death.

IV. **The Brazen Serpent a type of Christ on the Cross.**—Christ in His conversation with Nicodemus showed that the serpent of brass was a type or figure of Himself when He said, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up' (John iii. 14, 15).

Notice the points of resemblance.—(1) The serpent's bite was deadly, no human remedy could cure it; there is no human cure for the wound of sin. (2) The cure was fixed by God in one way, looking at the serpent; salvation is appointed by God in one way, looking unto Jesus. (3) The serpent was made in the likeness of poisonous serpents, but was itself harmless; Christ was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, a true man, yet sinless. (4) The serpent was set up so that any wounded Israelite, in whatever part of the camp he was, might see it; Christ was lifted up upon the Cross, and is held up in the preaching of the Gospel to every perishing sinner. (5) Every Israelite who looked was healed, surely, immediately, and completely; every one who looks to Jesus is made whole and receives the gift of eternal life.

The brazen serpent was preserved by the Jews, and incense was burnt to it. Hezekiah broke it in pieces and called it Nehushtan, a

mere piece of brass (2 Kings xviii. 4). When it became an idol and stood in the way of the worship of God it was time to destroy it.

LESSONS

1. Suffering is meant to humble us and bring us to God.
2. To be saved we must look unto Jesus, and if we look in faith we shall be saved.
3. We have all been bitten by the serpent sin. We all need healing, and must all look unto Him Who was lifted up to die in our sins. '**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.**'

TO THE TEACHER

It will be well to make use of a Map to show the wanderings of the Israelites as described in this lesson.

XIX.—DECISION IN THE MATTER OF RELIGION

Joshua xxiv. 1-25

Introduction.—**Moses** was not allowed to lead the Israelites into Canaan because of his sin in speaking 'unadvisedly with his lips,' rebelling against God, and 'believing Him not to sanctify Him' (Ps. cvi. 33; Num. xx. 12; xxvii. 12-14; Deut. xxxii. 51). Moses, though 'very meek,' was not perfect, and sin always causes suffering and disappointment, even when the sinner repents. His place as leader was given to Joshua, one of the two faithful spies who brought back the good report about Canaan (Num. xiv.) Joshua had been a slave in the brick-fields of Egypt, and was about forty years of age when, after sending plagues on Egypt, God delivered His people from bondage. He became the minister or servant of Moses, and was a good man and a brave soldier. A short time before his death Moses was commanded to set Joshua apart solemnly and publicly as his successor, and having done so, and having seen from Mount Nebo the land which he was not himself to enter, the old leader died upon the Mount.

Then as soon as the time of mourning was ended **Joshua** set to work, preparing to cross the Jordan and attack the Canaanites. He sent spies into Jericho, circumcised the people, kept the Passover, and was met and directed what to do by the Captain of the Lord's Host. For six years Joshua and the tribes were engaged in war with the Canaanites, and in that time they had conquered six nations with thirty-one kings, and become masters of the land. The Anakim or giants whom the distrusting spies had described as of irresistible strength, were all destroyed except in Philistia, and only a few outlying strongholds were possessed by Canaanites. Joshua, who was now an old man, proceeded to divide the land among the tribes, Eleazar the priest and the chiefs of the people helping in the work; the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh; six cities of refuge were appointed, cities were set apart for the Levites, and the warriors from the tribes settled on the other side of Jordan were disbanded and went peaceably to their homes.

I. **Israel assembled at Shechem** (v. 1).—Joshua was soon to take that last journey which all must take (Joshua xxiii.), but before he should take it, he wanted to meet the chiefs of the people whom he had led so long to give them his parting counsels. Where did he summon them to meet? At Shechem. This place, between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, was the scene of many remarkable incidents in Old Testament history. Here, soon after the first entry into Canaan, Joshua had read all the words of the law to the people (viii. 35); here Jacob had dedicated his house to God in words which Joshua now repeats (vv. 25, 26; Gen. xxxv. 1-4); here God gave His first recorded promise of the land to Abraham's seed (Gen. xii. 6); and here Joseph's bones were buried (v. 32; Acts vii. 16). All the tribes were represented, and the gathering must have been very solemn, for they knew they could not hear Joshua very often now.

II. **Joshua's parting Words** (vv. 2-15).—1. **He begins with a review of God's goodness,** reminds them of the great things God had done for

their fathers and themselves. He traces back their origin to Terah, the father of Abraham, who had been a worshipper of false gods, having his home among idolaters on the other side of 'the river,' as the Euphrates is commonly termed in the Bible, because it is the greatest river of Western Asia, contrasting strongly with the brooks or torrents of Palestine. He tells them how God had taken him from his native home, had led him through Canaan, had given him Isaac and multiplied his seed; how He had blessed Isaac, giving him two sons, and established the elder in Mount Seir, while Jacob the younger had been taken to Egypt; how, when they were oppressed, God had sent Moses and Aaron, had plagued the Egyptians, and delivered the children of Jacob. He describes the destruction of Pharaoh's horses and chariots in the Red Sea, and the miraculous power that had preserved them from the fury of their enemies. He refers to their wanderings in the wilderness, and the deliverance God had wrought for them there. He recalls the victories gained in Canaan, and shows that these had been secured, not by their own sword or bow, but by the wonder-working power of Jehovah, who had sent the hornet before them. [The word 'hornet' expresses under a strong figure the terror with which God struck the enemies of Israel (Deut. ii. 25; Joshua ii. 11). It is not quite certain what species of winged insect is meant. The stinging insects of hot countries are more formidable than those of our own country. Some years ago, as two European gentlemen with a boatman were passing up a river in India, a cloud of hornets overwhelmed them; one of the gentlemen, unable to resist the assaults of the furious insects, jumped into the water and was drowned, and the other gentleman and the boatman all but lost their lives from the stings inflicted.] He reminds them that for the possessions and the peace they now enjoyed they were indebted to Jehovah, who had given them a land for which they did not labour, cities they had not built, and vine-yards and olive-yards they had not planted.

2. **He solemnly exhorts the people to fear the Lord.**—They were entering on a new era of their history, and he bids them decide once for all that they will trust, worship, and serve Jehovah only. Joshua knew the importance of making a good beginning of life, and as the Israelites were now for the first time entering on life as a nation with a home of their own, he desires them to make a solemn resolution to serve God. It was a time to choose, and he sets a choice before them. Whether will they serve the false gods that Terah worshipped, or the living and true God, Jehovah, who had done so much for them?

3. **He appeals to his own example.**—Joshua knew that the best teacher is a good example, and he told them plainly what his own choice was, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (v. 15).

III. **The People's Resolve** (vv. 16-20).—The people were deeply impressed by the words of their good old leader, and they gave very quickly a wise and proper reply. They said they could not forsake Jehovah, that they gratefully remembered His goodness in delivering, preserving, and settling them, and that their minds were made up to serve Him. Joshua bade them remember that it was not enough to *say* that they would serve God. It is easy to say it, but hard to do it. 'Ye cannot serve the Lord,' said Joshua (v. 19),—moved merely by strong feeling and

excitement, without real turning from idols, without true repentance and faith. God is very jealous, His servants must live holy lives, and as Israel's history showed, He cannot pass over acts of transgression and sin. He is angry with those who break His laws, and will punish all who do not serve Him faithfully. If they made a choice for God, they must bear in mind that if they did not continue faithful, He who had done them good would turn and do them hurt, and consume them. Joshua set the whole truth before them, for he did not wish them to decide without full knowledge and consideration of what a pledge to serve God laid on them as duty. Like Paul, he did not shun to declare unto them all the counsel of God.

IV. **A Covenant made** (vv. 21-25).—The people once more said they were quite determined to choose and serve Jehovah, and then Joshua proceeded to confirm the covenant. He told them that they were witnesses against themselves, that they had made this choice freely and willingly, and they answered that they were witnesses.

Then Joshua bade them prove that they were truthful and earnest in making the choice, by putting away from them the strange gods which some Israelites seem to have had with them even then, as there was secret idolatry in Jacob's household and in Samuel's day. And thus exhorted once more, the people with one voice replied, 'The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.' So Joshua concluded the covenant between Jehovah and the people, and when he had written it in a book, he set up a great stone under an oak that was by the sanctuary of Jehovah—the place at which Abraham and Jacob had sacrificed and worshipped, and which their children might well regard as holy ground.

LESSON

The lesson is expressed in the title which it bears—*Decision in the matter of religion.* Joshua's character was marked by decision. He chose to serve God, and kept his purpose fixedly before him through life. He was not moved from his choice by the words or acts of those who were about him. When the ten spies were frightened by the giants, he believed God. He knew that no man can serve two masters, and he was faithful to the One he had chosen. He made his choice when he was young and strong, and when he was old and feeble he looked back with thankfulness upon the decision of his youth. With his latest voice he charged the people to choose as he had chosen. He charged them to choose at once. **'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.'**

Moses made a wise choice (Heb. xi. 25), so did Joshua and so should all. Have you decided for God? You are young, and that is a very strong reason for decision, for every day you put off will make it harder to do right. The Israelites were a young nation, and the choice they made when Joshua called them to Shechem was one that brought with it happy results (v. 31). God has given a special promise to them that seek Him early (Prov. viii. 16). Be a decided servant of God, saying 'No' when you are tempted to sin, and 'Yes' when you are called to duty.

XX.—NAOMI AND HER DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW (ORPAH AND RUTH)

Ruth i.

Introduction.—The reason why the story of Ruth is contained in the Bible is found in the fact that she was one of the ancestors of 'Jesus Christ, the Son of David,' who 'was born in Bethlehem of Judæa' (Matt. i. 1; ii. 1). Among the warriors whom Joshua led to victory over the Canaanites was one called Salmon, who was the grandfather of Ruth's son Obed, whose son Jesse was the father of King David. What is told us of Naomi and her daughters-in-law took place towards the close of the time when 'the Judges ruled in Israel.' Joshua and the elders who survived him were dead, and the covenant which Joshua had written down was forgotten and broken by many of the people. God punished them, as their leader had said He would, if they were unfaithful, and one of the punishments with which He visited them was famine.

I. **Naomi's Trials** (vv. 1-5).—Among other places where the famine pinched was Bethlehem, which, though its name 'means the house of bread,' and its older name Ephrath signifies 'fruitfulness,' was not exempted from the prevailing scarcity. Here lived a household of 'Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah.' Ephratah (iv. 11) was the older name of Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 16-19). Jesse is called an Ephrathite (1 Sam. xvii. 12). The head was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and they had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They seem to have been at one time in a good position among the Bethlehemites (vv. 19-21, ii., iii.) But famine laid its hand heavily upon them, and Elimelech resolved to emigrate. He and his family accordingly crossed the Jordan and resided in the land of Moab.

Misfortune followed the family in their new home. First, Elimelech died. Naomi, with her two sons, continued to live in Moab, and after a time Mahlon and Chilion married wives who belonged to the country. One was named Orpah, the other Ruth. After Naomi had been ten years in Moab, her sons died, and she was left with the two childless widows, Orpah and Ruth.

II. **The Daughters-in-law proved** (vv. 6-18).—Naomi had never forgotten her old home. She had now no tie to Moab except the graves of her dead; and when she had been told that the famine at Bethlehem was ended, and that Jehovah had brought back abundant harvests to Israel, she made up her mind to return. Accordingly with her daughters-in-law she set out for Judah. They had been dutiful wives; they were kind and helpful daughters. Now they willingly left Moab in her company, perhaps to escort her on the way, but more likely to go with her to Bethlehem.

As they journeyed, Naomi seems to have thought that she was taxing their love for her too strongly. She knew how she had longed for a sight of her old home, and she may have thought that they too would pine in Canaan and desire to go back to Moab. So she turned to them and said, 'Go back to your own mothers' homes.' It was a custom in Israel for a brother to marry his brother's widow, but Naomi had

no more sons to take the places of their dead husbands, and could not hold out to them the hope of finding other husbands and new homes for them where she was going, whereas among their own kindred they might make happy marriages and would have old friends around them.

The scene upon the road from Moab was a very touching one. The three women wept upon each other's necks in close embrace, as, her words choked by sobs, Naomi again begged her daughters-in-law to return. She gave each a kiss, meant to be a parting one, and Orpah returned it and went back. But Ruth was of another spirit. She would not accept the kiss as a token of farewell. She clung to her mother-in-law and refused to be separated. Still Naomi reasoned with her and begged her to depart, pointing to Orpah now on her way back to Moab. Perhaps because she believed it would be best for Ruth to return, perhaps in order to prove whether she would prove constant, she said, 'Return thou after thy sister-in-law.' But Ruth would not be persuaded. She had given her love and her trust to Naomi, and would not forsake her. In words of firm decision, words as expressive of deep affection as any that ever were spoken by human lips, she answered, 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.' And she closed her impassioned address with a solemn oath expressed in a form frequent in the books of Samuel and Kings, showing that she was not ignorant of Israel's God and faith—'Jehovah, do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.'

III. **Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem** (vv. 19-22).—Naomi saw that Ruth's words came from her heart, and, happy in the love so fully tested by her own advice and Orpah's example, and so nobly shown by self-sacrifice, she 'left speaking unto her,' and the two went on their way to Bethlehem. When they reached the village, many remembered Naomi, and were excited by the news of her arrival. 'Is that Naomi?' the women asked, as they saw her altered looks and her robes of widowhood. How changed her position from that in which she had left Bethlehem ten years before! Then she had a husband and two sons; now her only companion is a young Moabitish woman—a widow like herself. 'Alas,' was her reply, 'call me not Naomi (pleasant), call me Mara (bitter)'—Mara was a more fitting name for her in her changed circumstances—'for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.'

Naomi was ignorant of the good things God had in store for her. Like Jacob when he said 'All these things are against me,' she made a great mistake. Her daughter-in-law was to do more for her in Bethlehem than husband and sons had accomplished, and through Ruth—whom she for the moment sets aside as of no account, saying, 'I have been brought home again empty'—her name was to be handed down to everlasting remembrance, and her history to be associated with that of God's own Son. She did not know how much she was to owe to Ruth, who was truly God's gift to her, whom love for her had brought to Bethlehem.

Her kindred and acquaintances asked, 'Is this Naomi?' but left her

unassisted in her poverty. Ruth stood by her, and was ready to engage in humble and hard work to support her mother-in-law. We feel for Naomi in the bitterness of her sorrow on returning to the scene of her happy youth, but there is a touch of ingratitude and forgetfulness of Ruth's love and sincerity in the exclamation, 'I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.' 'Forget not all His benefits.'

LESSONS

1. Ruth's conduct illustrates unselfish affection. True love 'seeketh not her own.' The love that is not shown in acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice is not worthy of the name. Orpah had a measure of affection for her mother-in-law, but was not ready to deny herself for her sake. Ruth decided rather to suffer affliction with Naomi than go back to friends and comfort in Moab.

2. We can prove love only by self-denial. The boy who never denies himself a pleasure in order that he may do a kindness to another, who refuses to give up his own ease that he may make others happy, is selfish, and does not truly love God or his neighbour.

3. **'Thy God shall be my God'** was Ruth's noble choice, and her example is worthy of all imitation.

XXI.—GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF TO THE CHILD SAMUEL

1 Sam. iii. 1-10 (compare 2 Tim. iii. 14, 15)

Introduction—Historical.—With the birth and call of Samuel a new era begins in Israel. Between the death of Joshua and the anointing of Saul to be the first king of Israel there lies a dark and unsettled period of three hundred and fifty years. There was little unity among the tribes, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges xvii. 6). Faith in God had fallen low; the worship of God was neglected; even the idolatries of the surrounding peoples were practised. These peoples took advantage of the anarchy that prevailed, and repeatedly oppressed the Israelites. Then God raised up judges, Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and others, to deliver the people when they cried to Him, and to rule over the tribe or the district in which deliverance had been wrought. With Samson and Eli, who had the Philistines to fight, the line of the judges was drawing to a close. Samuel was the last, being, in fact, priest, prophet, and judge, all in one. With Samuel the Prophetic Order, which became so powerful, took its rise (Acts iii. 24), and with him there opened the more prosperous period of the nation's life when Israel gathered unity and strength under Saul, and then under David and Solomon attained to its greatest glory. It is in keeping with God's way of choosing the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, that the revival of national and religious life in Israel begins in the heart of a Levite's wife, and in the dedication of her unborn child to God. [Compare the birth of John the Baptist (Luke i. 24); the birth of Martin Luther, the miner's son.]

Practical.—What a pity it would be if children, even little children, were not thought fit to know and love and serve God! But does God care for children? Has He need of them? Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 2), David (1 Sam. xvi. 11, 12), Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 1, 2), Jeremiah (Jer. i. 5), John the Baptist (Luke i. 80), Timothy (2 Tim. iii. 15), all knew and served God when very young. And what did Jesus say about little children (Mark x. 14)? Our lesson to-day tells us of a little child whom God had need of, and whose service was pleasing to Him. This child was Samuel, who was given to God by his mother from his birth, who served God in the tabernacle, and whom God called to be His prophet while he was very young.

1. **The little Child.**—What was his father's name? His mother's? They were among the really good people in those evil times. How did they show their love of God's service (1 Sam. i. 3)? What was Hannah's great sorrow (i. 4-8)? For what did she pray (i. 11)? What was her vow? At last a baby born to her—a boy called Samuel. What does the name mean? Samuel could never forget that he was a child of prayer, as long as he remembered his own name. His mother looked upon him, not as hers, but God's. Did not love him less for that; but thought it an honour to have a son who was God's child. So when he was weaned she brought him to the tabernacle at Shiloh, and left him with the good-natured old high priest Eli to

learn to serve God in His temple. Happy boy, to be given to God from his birth! Happy mother, that God should accept for His service the child He had given to her prayer! [What a privilege to be born in a godly home, to be prayed for from birth, to be given to God by devout parents, as you have been by your baptism, and to be accepted by Him from earliest years!]

II. **The little Priest.**—Picture Samuel as a little priest. He wears a priest's sleeveless coat. Who made it for him every year (ii. 19)? Over the coat he wears a priest's ephod, also made to his size—a white linen garment in two pieces front and back, joined at the shoulders, and looking like a double apron (ii. 18). See him doing the tasks he has to do within the tabernacle.

What was the tabernacle? The house or tent where God dwelt among the Israelites, first set up in the wilderness (Exod. xxv. 8 ff.), now, after many wanderings, set up at Shiloh, in the Promised Land. Within the enclosing tent were (1) the courts, where the people worshipped, (2) the Holy Place, where the priests officiated, and (3) the Most Holy Place, where God dwelt between the cherubim over the mercy-seat. Into the Holy of Holies the high priest alone might enter, and that only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. In the forecourt of the tabernacle was the altar, where offerings and sacrifices were laid, and it was the duty of the priests to present the offerings to God on behalf of the people. In the tabernacle God revealed Himself as a gracious and forgiving God, and the sacrifices and the priesthood foreshadowed Jesus, who is our Perfect Sacrifice for sin and our unchangeable High Priest above.

The tabernacle was a sacred place, and there Samuel as a little priest performed sacred duties, assisting at the sacrifices, fetching the censer for the incense, laying fresh fuel upon the altar, and filling the lamps with oil. What a grand school to Samuel, both for the knowledge and service of God, was the tabernacle at Shiloh! [Samuel teaches us by his example to love God's house, God's day, God's ordinances.]

III. **The little Prophet.**—Samuel was now to be called to a higher office still. The **priest** speaks to God for man, represents the sinner with sacrifices and offerings before God. The **prophet** speaks to man for God, making known to man what God reveals to him of His will. God was now to reveal Himself to Samuel, and to make him the messenger of His will to the people.

Think of Samuel lying awake on his little couch within the tabernacle, near where Eli slept. All was still and dark; the lamps were still burning in the Holy Place. The stillness is broken by a Voice which calls, 'Samuel, Samuel!' At once he is on his feet and by Eli's side. 'Here am I; for thou calledst me,' said the prompt and obedient child. What did Eli say? Again and yet a third time the Voice called the child, and Eli perceived that the Voice was the Voice of Him who dwelt between the cherubim. Bade him lie down and answer when next it called, 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.' Perhaps the shining cloud moved from the mercy-seat and the symbol of the Divine Presence was seen, for the Lord came and stood as the Voice called, 'Samuel, Samuel.' [How soft and gentle the Voice must have been, when Samuel mistook it for the kind old high priest's voice! God's voice is not a voice of terror, but of love.]

It was the Voice that called Adam in the garden; Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees; Moses in the Burning Bush and on the Mount; that was heard by Elijah at Horeb; by Jesus on the banks of Jordan, and on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Voice told him that behind the curtain and on the mercy-seat was the living God. It was the Voice of One who knew him, and called him by his name; who had need of him to be His prophet; who would honour and bless him all his days.

What a moment that was in the life of Samuel, when the Voice from the excellent glory called him! He was ready with the answer, always so pleasing to God, 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.' From ready obedience to an earthly master he had learned to yield obedience to the great Master in the heavens. Young as he was, he had faith to listen and to obey the heavenly call, and soon all Israel knew that there was a prophet in Israel by the divine messages which he bore.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

As the Lord had need of the child Samuel, so He 'hath need of thee,' the youngest that hears this story. He wants your trust, your love, your willing and cheerful service. He speaks to you in His providence, by your friends and teachers, and especially in His Word, and happy will you be if you say, 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.'

XXII.—GOD'S CHOICE OF DAVID AS KING OF ISRAEL

1 Sam. xvi. 1-13

Introduction.—In last lesson we saw Samuel as a little child called by God to be His prophet to Israel. In this lesson he comes before us as an old man, fulfilling, perhaps, the greatest work of his life. From his youth till now he had been greatly honoured by God, by the nation, and even by the wayward King Saul. But his life had not been all sunshine. He had sons who had not turned out well (viii. 3), and that was a grief to him. The people would have a king to reign over them like other nations (viii. 19, 20), and Samuel was vexed that they should seek any other king but God. King Saul, the man of their choice, added, by his wilfulness and disobedience, to Samuel's troubles, and now Samuel was sore distressed because God had rejected Saul from reigning over Israel. Once again God commands Samuel to go and anoint a king over the people, and thus we meet for the first time with David, the shepherd king and the sweet singer of Israel.

David was the first to make Israel great among the nations, and he became the chief kingly type of Christ. In the direct line from Abraham to Christ, David stands out alone (Matt. i. 1). From the annals of his reign and from his Psalms we know more of David's outer and inner life than of any other character of ancient times. Our lesson is deeply interesting as showing the lowly beginnings of his great career. We see in it, again, God's way of raising up 'the poor out of the dust . . . that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people' (Ps. cxiii. 7, 8). And it was His faithful prophet Samuel upon whom God put the honour of anointing David for his exalted office.

I. **Samuel's Visit to Bethlehem.**—It was with mingled feelings that Samuel took his horn of oil to anoint one of the sons of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, in the place of Saul. An old man's hopes for the future are often dimmed by regrets for the past. Samuel and the nation had been disappointed in Saul. He began well and he had many popular qualities,—he was handsome and strong and brave. But he would take his own way in disobedience both to God and His prophet. More than once God had reproved and warned him, but now his rejection was fixed (xv. 28). He had grown cruel and suspicious, and Samuel was afraid he would kill him if he knew the errand on which he had gone. So God calmed the anxieties and fears of Samuel by bidding him hold a sacrifice at Bethlehem to which Jesse and his sons should be invited. When Samuel appeared at Bethlehem, how was he received? Can you think of others at Bethlehem who were afraid on a still greater occasion (Luke ii. 9-12)? See how Samuel calmed the fears of the elders, and bade them prepare by washing themselves, and by prayer to God for the solemn service. [It is always fitting, when some duty is to be done or some important transaction to be carried through, that God should be called to witness it.]

II. **The Home of Jesse.**—Jesse had his home at Bethlehem, a village among the hills of Judah, six miles south of Jerusalem. It was associated before this time with two heroines of Hebrew history—Rachel (Gen. xlviii. 7)

and Ruth. Now it was to become more famous, till all its old renown was eclipsed by that which it was to win as the birthplace of Jesus (Matt. ii.; Luke ii.) Ruth had found a home at Bethlehem. What relation was she to Jesse (Ruth iv. 13-22)? Jesse was chief of his clan, loyal to the king and faithful to God (xvi. 3; xvii. 12). How many sons had Jesse? Where did David come in the family? What was his work in the household? Have we any hint how his brothers treated him (xvii. 28)? David was trained to work; he lived a simple and a hardy life; and he grew up brave (xvii. 34, 35) and God-fearing (xvi. 18), often alone with his flocks on the hillsides, and there holding converse with Nature (Ps. viii. 3) and with God.

III. **God's Choice.**—Samuel did not know which of Jesse's sons was the choice of God. But the choice belonged to God; for He was the true King of Israel under whom all the kings ruled. As God's thoughts are higher than man's thoughts, we need not wonder if His choice is different from man's. In the East the eldest son is the most thought of and the youngest the least, and when Samuel sees Eliab, Jesse's eldest son, tall and strong, he thinks him quite what Saul's successor should be. But God tells him that Eliab is not His choice, nor Abinadab, nor Shammah, nor any of all the seven who passed before him. So the remaining son, David, the youngest of all, who was held of no account by Jesse, had to be sent for from the hills. When he stood before Samuel, a slender stripling with red hair, and beautiful eyes, and fine face, the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him: for this is he.'

Samuel was wrong in looking merely to outward appearance; if Saul had been judged only by outward appearance, by manly grace and natural strength, there would have been no need to reject him. A good temper is better than a pretty face; a kind heart than a strong frame. Samuel would have chosen the eldest, God preferred the youngest; Samuel would have chosen the strong and stalwart Eliab, God preferred the stripling David. 'Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' It is not by size or strength or beauty, but by the heart that God judges. How important to have the heart pure and right and true! If the heart is wrong, all is wrong; if the heart is right, all is right.

In choosing David, God had regard (1) to his *youth*—the young mind can be formed and the young nature moulded to God's ways, and God seeks young hearts for His service, and youth is the best time for giving the heart to Him; (2) to his *purity of heart*—a pure heart gives true manliness and is always pleasing to God. Some men make themselves great; God made David great, for God chose, trained, and fitted him for the throne of Israel. And David was not forgetful, nor was the nation ashamed, of his lowly birth, for they praised God for 'choosing David His servant, and taking him from the sheepfolds . . . to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance' (Ps. lxxviii. 70). [God often chooses His most honoured servants from lowly places. William Carey, the shoemaker, to be the pioneer of modern missions to the heathen; David Livingstone, the factory boy, to explore Africa; J. A. Garfield, the backwoodsman's boy, to rule the United States.]

IV. **The Anointing of David.**—This ceremony made David king, and

oil is still used at the crowning of sovereigns, though only a time-honoured and empty form. The anointing oil set David apart as king and pledged to him Divine fitness for the duties of government and judgment. Perhaps, as yet, only Samuel knew what it meant; but when David came to know, the thought of it helped him both in his waiting and in his acting. The oil is an emblem of the Spirit of God, who gives light and life and power, and 'the Spirit of God came mightily upon David from that day forward' (xvi. 13). All God's children are anointed as kings and priests to Him, and those who have the anointing of the Spirit here will be crowned with the crown of life hereafter.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

David the king is a type of Jesus the King of kings. David was born at Bethlehem, and Jesus, of the house and lineage of David, was born at Bethlehem too. David was anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel, and Jesus at His baptism received the Spirit to fit Him for His ministry and work. David was publicly anointed as king over Israel at Hebron, and Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by His resurrection from the dead (Rom. i. 4).

TO THE TEACHER

Perhaps 'the Home of Jesse' and 'God's Choice' is all that a teacher can well set before the youngest children. But it is possible to interest the children of this Grade in David as the kingly type of Christ, and in David as His great kingly ancestor.

XXIII.—DAVID AND GOLIATH

1 Sam. xvii.

Introduction.—What was the subject of last lesson? Tell why the throne of Israel was to pass from the line of Saul. Who anointed David? What came upon David after his anointing? At the beginning of to-day's lesson David is only a humble shepherd boy, though secretly anointed to be king; at the close of it we shall see him hailed as the champion of Israel and the saviour of his country. He now gives proof of the Spirit which had come upon him, and draws the eyes of the nation upon its uncrowned but future king.

See how this came about. The Philistines were the great troublers of Israel in the days of Samson, Eli, Samuel, and Saul. Show this by one or two incidents (Judges xiv.-xvi.; 1 Sam. iv., xiii.) They were a brave and powerful people, living in the south-west of the land of Canaan, and having five principal cities. Their lands were fertile, they were skilled in the arts of life, and they had a strong army, well armed and even furnished with chariots (1 Sam. xiii. 5). They had every advantage over Israel except this,—they did not know nor worship the living God, but worshipped their national god Dagon.

They had now come up from their cities, and the Israelites under Saul had met them in the valley of Elah (vv. 1-3). Picture the two armies on opposite slopes with a plain between, and through the plain a dry torrent-bed, filled with loose stones and pebbles, cutting its way. Forty days the two armies have faced each other, the Philistines, strong as they were, not daring to attack the well-chosen ground on which King Saul had entrenched his forces. Morning and evening all that time there has come forth from the Philistine host a huge giant who is their champion. He challenges the Israelites to send forth a man to fight him. The one who wins will do so for the army to which he belongs as well as for himself. This was once a common thing in warfare. [A recent traveller in Eastern Palestine tells how, when two tribes of Bedouin beyond the Jordan were at war, and were posted on opposite hills, two horsemen came forth into the field to fight, each for his side.] Note the figures and the scenes in this fight.

I. **The Philistine Giant** (vv. 4-10).—Forth he strides—tall and strong and boastful. His name is Goliath, of Gath. He is nearly ten feet in height. What armour does he wear? Tell the pieces. Philistines proud of him—think nothing can beat him—are sure of victory because they have him. Goliath is the very picture of pride and self-confidence as well as warlike strength. He has little doubt what the result would be, and no doubt he thinks that when he has slain the champion who comes against him, the Philistines will have the Israelites for an easy prey. But the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. 'Let not the mighty man glory in his might' (Jer. ix. 23), says God. The Philistine did not know what he did when he defied the God of Israel.

II. **The Frightened Israelites** (v. 11).—The daily challenge of Goliath caused daily terror to the Israelites. King Saul, who was head and

shoulders above the rest of the people, was as frightened as the rest (v. 11). Not long ago he had beaten the Philistines completely (1 Sam. xiv. 20-23), but now his courage was gone. Jonathan, Saul's eldest son, was the noblest warrior in the camp of Israel. He had before now beaten a Philistine army all alone (1 Sam. xiv. 12, 13), but even he does not accept the challenge. Perhaps the army would not have allowed them to risk their lives, as David's army once would not let him (2 Sam. xviii. 3). The brave men of Saul's army (xiii. 2) all kept out of the giant's way. Why was there such fear? What was the cause of such faint-heartedness? They had lost faith in God, and their terror just shows how powerless and spiritless people must be when they feel that God is not with them. God had rejected Saul; Saul knew this and felt helpless. So it ever is. There is no true courage in the face of danger or temptation, if we feel forsaken by God.

III. **The Shepherd Champion** (vv. 12-31).—When Saul and Jonathan and the captains of Israel were greatly afraid, there was still one who had both faith and courage. Is he a warrior trained to fight and used to camps? Has he the confidence that comes from skill in the use of warlike weapons? Has he the courage that comes from having often beaten his foe in the fight? Not at all. He is a shepherd lad, a stripling, who never yet fought in armour, nor with any weapons but horsehair sling and shepherd's club. The champion who appears when all besides shrink back is David, the son of Jesse. Tell how he comes there—what reception he meets with—from his brother, from Saul. He gets little encouragement from anybody. But he cannot bear that this Philistine should defy the armies of God. He sees an opportunity of striking a blow for God and for the liberty of Israel. He remembers how God had helped him in past days (vv. 34-37), and he trusts Him to help him still. He has no fear. He heeds not the doubts and fears of his friends, but looks to God alone.

IV. **The Victory of Faith** (vv. 32-54).—David looked a mere child as he went to meet the giant. It could not but seem madness in such a stripling to offer to fight Goliath with only his sling and stones from the torrent-bed. But David had something better than shield or sword and spear—he had a brave heart, filled with confidence in God. [General Gordon in the war with the Chinese rebels, and at the last at Khartoum, wore no arms, but carried only a little cane. His trust was in God.] Faith in God takes away fear and gives courage. So David went out to meet Goliath. The giant despised the stripling, and, cursing David by his gods, said he would give his flesh to the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air. As he strode forward with his coat of mail and his mighty spear, he might well have made David quake. But David ran to meet him, putting all his trust in God, and then taking a stone from his shepherd's bag, he smote the Philistine in the forehead, so that he fell on his face at once to the earth. With the giant's own sword David cut off his head and finished him. Faith in God had won the day. The Philistines fled and David was hailed as the deliverer of Israel. It was a deed of bravery sung by the women of Israel and remembered to all generations (1 Sam. xviii. 7).

V. **The Giants we must fight.**—These are many and strong. **Pride,**

temper, selfishness, lying, are giants which children have to fight. Is there any sin that gets the better of any of us? It is a giant we must fight. Are we sometimes afraid of the sinful things which meet us, and do we despair of ever overcoming them? Let us remember David and Goliath. Let us think of Jesus in the wilderness tempted of the devil. He overcame the tempter with no other weapon than the Word of God. Let us put on the armour of God (Ephes. vi. 13-18). Let us trust God to help us and to deliver us. A little word of promise has often overthrown the giants of doubt and fear. When we are helpless we can always pray to God, and with Him we are more than conquerors (Jas. iv. 7; 2 Tim. ii. 3).

'Many giants great and tall,
Stalking through the land,
Headlong to the earth will fall
If met by Daniel's band.'

TO THE TEACHER

The story in this lesson is so graphic and vivid that children need but little help in taking it in. The teacher may dwell upon special sins which he knows the children have to fight against. There is a good description of the scene in Thomson's *The Land and the Book* ('Southern Palestine and Jerusalem,' pp. 227-229), and a most helpful account of the relative military positions of the Israelites and Philistines in chap. v. of *The Least of all Lands*, by Principal Miller of Madras.

XXIV.—DAVID AND JONATHAN

1 Sam. xviii. 1-4; xix. 1-7; xx.; xxiii. 16-18; 2 Sam. i. 17-27; ix.

Introduction.—The records of friendship contain not a few beautiful stories of the love and devotion of friends. The friendship of Bruce and Douglas is one of the most beautiful in our own Scottish history. The Old Testament gives us a beautiful picture of friendship in the devotion of Ruth, the Moabitess, to her mother-in-law Naomi; and in the New Testament we have touching evidences of the friendship cherished by Paul for Timothy. But for moral beauty and dramatic interest there is no story in any literature to match this Old Testament story of the friendship between David and Jonathan.

A true friend is one of the best gifts of God, and one of the greatest blessings of life. How to **be** true friends, how to **win** and to **keep** true friends, is a lesson which children cannot learn too early. We see the qualities which make a true friendship in this beautiful story of David and Jonathan.

I. **First Meeting** (xviii. 1-3).—In last lesson we saw the bravery of David in slaying the Philistine giant Goliath. How did David come to accept his challenge? With what weapons did David fight? What was David's confidence? What was the result? Picture David standing before the king and his captains (1 Sam. xvii. 57)—with red hair, beautiful eyes, and fine face (xvii. 42,) fresh from the fight, with the head of Goliath in his hand. There is one there whose heart kindles at the sight of David. Jonathan, the king's eldest son, had seen David go forth to meet the challenge of the Philistine giant. His heart had gone with David to the combat, and now in the hour of victory he is drawn to him as a kindred spirit and a friend. [In this way, boys and girls make friends still. A brave act, the refusal to do a mean or wrong thing, a kind or unselfish deed, will win the admiration of kindred spirits and perhaps prove the beginning of lifelong friendship.]

Think of the **differences** of station and training between David and Jonathan. Jonathan was the king's son, brought up in a palace, trained to wear arms and to fight under his warlike father. David was the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, brought up to keep his father's sheep on the hillsides, knowing no weapon but his sling and his shepherd's club. Jonathan was a trained soldier, blunt and honest; David was a minstrel, who sang songs of his own making, accompanying them on the harp (xvi. 23). David gained Jonathan's heart by his modesty, simplicity, and gift of song; and Jonathan won David's by his frankness, noble bearing, and guileless nature.

Think also of the **points of likeness** which knit them together. Both were **brave**—Jonathan at Michmash (1 Sam. xiv. 1 ff.); David killing lion and bear, and fighting and slaying Goliath (xvii. 34-37, 32-54). Both were **unselfish**—Jonathan, in his readiness to die (xiv. 43), and to acknowledge David as the future king (xxiii. 17); David, in his conduct as the king's son-in-law (xviii. 17-29), and in his treatment of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. ix.) Both were **God-fearing**—Jonathan relying upon God's help in attacking the

Philistines (xiv. 6), entreating Him to witness the covenant (xx. 12-14), taking Him as the bond to make his friendship with David steadfast and enduring (xx. 42); David trusting God from his youth (xvi. 13, 18), going in His name to meet Goliath (xvii. 45), prospering by God's favour at the court of Saul (xviii. 12-16). Two brave, unselfish, God-fearing spirits like David and Jonathan could not help being drawn to one another.

II. **Fast Friendship.**—The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him, as his own soul. Friendship has been called 'one soul in two bodies,' and this comes very near it. The friendship was the more wonderful that it was between rivals—Jonathan being the heir-apparent to the throne, and David being already secretly anointed by Samuel as the future king. Yet David not puffed up, but ready to yield due honour to Jonathan (xx. 41). Not a cloud of jealousy in the mind of Jonathan though he knew what was to happen. See now from the scattered passages:—

1. **Friendship's tokens** (xviii. 4).—Jonathan gave David his courtly robe and his fighting attire—sword, bow, girdle. They were not only for David's use, but also pledges of favour. [Boys and girls give penknives, needlecases, etc., to great friends.]

2. **Friendship's service** (xix. 1-7).—Jonathan showed himself a true friend—warning David that his life was in danger from Saul's hatred, standing up for David with Saul, reminding him of David's services to the nation, and getting leave to bring David back to court.

3. **Friendship's covenant** (xx.)—Jonathan and David made a covenant at their first acquaintance (xviii. 3)—an engagement, of which the sword and the bow were tokens, to trust and love and stand by each other for ever. It was renewed with prayer to God at this interview when David complained of Saul's attacks on his life, which Jonathan, always a loyal son as well as a steadfast friend, was unwilling to believe. David absents himself from Saul's table. What was the pretext? Jonathan in danger of his life from his father's anger. Tell about the boy and the arrows. The covenant to bind not only David and Jonathan, but their descendants, and interview closed with kisses and weeping (xx. 41, 42).

4. **Friendship's climax** (xxiii. 16-18).—This reached when Jonathan sought out David in the wilderness and acknowledged him as his father's successor on the throne that should have been his. Noble and unselfish words: 'Thou shalt be king in Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.' [Think how hard it is to congratulate one who has carried off a prize of which you were sure.]

5. **Friendship's lament** (2 Sam. i. 17-27).—Jonathan, loyal to Saul though he knew his fortunes were hopeless, died with him in battle against the Philistines on Gilboa (1 Sam. xxxi. 6; 2 Sam. i. 23). David pours out his heart in this passionate and noble lament. What does he say of Jonathan's love?

6. **Friendship remembered** (2 Sam. ix.)—David, now on the throne, seeks out any survivor of the family of Saul—finds Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan. Doesn't kill him, as cruel custom was (contrast Jehu, 2 Kings x. 13, 14), but gives him the lands that should have been Jonathan's and a place at the royal table. The friendship between

David and Jonathan was remembered in the family of David, for Solomon likely had it in mind (Prov. xvii. 17; xviii. 24).

III. **A Model Friendship.**—Such a friendship not out of our reach. There are friends, like David and Jonathan, in all ranks of life, loving warmly, constantly, unselfishly, and in the fear of God. To be true friends we must be true, unselfish, God-fearing. Selfish people cannot **have** and cannot **be** real friends. Friendship in sin is a rope of sand; but friendship in the love and fear of God will bear any strain. Choose friends from those who are good and fear God, and stand up for them and be true to them always.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

The friendship of David and Jonathan is a type of Christ's friendship for His people.—Christ is the **Best Friend**—a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother (Prov. xviii. 24). Jonathan, the king's son, cheerfully gave up the throne of Israel in favour of David; Jesus, the Son of the King of kings, left the blessedness of heaven to die for us, that we might be made fit to sit with Him at last on His throne. Jonathan and David delighted in each other's company; there is nothing Jesus wishes more than the love and friendship and service of young lives, and there is nothing we should cherish more than His favour and presence with us (Rev. iii. 20; John xiv. 23, 24). Happy are they who can say from the heart, 'This is my Beloved and this is my Friend; my Beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand. Yea, He is altogether lovely' (Song of Solomon v. 10, 16).

'One there is above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend:
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end.
They who once His kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

With the young children of the Grade the teacher will dwell shortly on the 'Introduction,' and shortly picture out the 'First Meeting.' The three points of 'Fast Friendship,' 'Model Friendship,' and 'Spiritual Lesson' will be the main points for them. Under 'Fast Friendship' the teacher will do well to refer only to (1), (2), and (4) in the case of younger pupils. Time and care should be given to the Spiritual Lesson in the case of all the pupils.

XXV.—ABSALOM: HIS UNFILIAL CONDUCT AND FATE

2 Sam. xv. 1-12; xviii.

Introduction.—The last three lessons have been about David. You remember how he was set before us in them: in the first, the shepherd lad of Bethlehem; in the next, the champion of Israel; in the third, the friend of Jonathan. In David there we saw much to admire and imitate. He is set before us to-day as the aged, broken-down king of Israel, whom we can only pity and be sorry for. He had been king now for many years; since the death of Saul. We pity him all the more that he had been, as king, brave and wise and powerful. His reign had been glorious (2 Sam. viii., x.); but now troubles had fallen thick upon him. His troubles were partly of his own making (Ps. li.), partly from his children, whom he had loved only too fondly. His eldest son, Amnon, was a bad man, and vexed his father sorely (2 Sam. xiii. 19-21). Then his sad death by the hand of his brother Absalom vexed David still more (2 Sam. xiii. 28, 29). For it was Absalom, the very son of whom he was fondest, who grieved David most. He had named him Absalom—'father of peace'; and it was he who, instead of bringing peace, broke the peace of the kingdom, and all but drove his father from the throne. Absalom was a man of great gifts and powers, spoiled as a child, flattered as a man, and at last wrecked and ruined by vanity, selfishness, and deceitfulness. The stages in his sad career are plain. Look at his life and see

I. **A Spoiled Child.**—You know what a spoiled child is. It is the last thing you would wish to be. A child which cries or sulks till it gets all it wants, is never checked nor denied anything, is always petted and indulged: that is a spoiled child. Such was Absalom, and the reasons are plain.

(1) His mother was a king's daughter, such as no other of David's wives was; and her children, Absalom and Tamar, were greatly thought of for their mother's sake (2 Sam. iii. 3; xiii. 1). The children of the great and the rich are apt to be spoiled by people who are about them. (2) He was a very beautiful child—grew up to be the most beautiful man in Israel (2 Sam. xiv. 25, 26). It is not easy to say 'no' to a pretty face and winning manner, and the child Absalom would likely get everything he asked.

This is a bad thing for any child, though you may not think so now. And it was a bad thing for Absalom, for petting and flattering only made him vain, selfish, and deceitful. Many a high-born child or beautiful child is saved from these dangers by a Christian mother. Queen Victoria had such a mother. Good Lord Shaftesbury had a pious nurse. But there was no such good influence in Absalom's home. His mother was a heathen, who did not worship the true God, and very likely her servants were so too (2 Sam. iii. 3; 1 Sam. xxvii. 8). How different from his father David's early training! Tending the sheep on the hills, kept in order by his seven brothers at home, but taught to trust and serve God. No wonder Absalom grew

II. **A Selfish Man.**—To be admired, made much of, allowed to

follow his own bent, taught to think only of himself, of his beauty, of his fine manners, was sure to make Absalom selfish. People made him believe that he should be the first man in the kingdom. And he was very nearly that now. There was his father on the throne, and Amnon the heir to it, and Absalom next. Absalom could not wait till power came to him. He must have it at once. He got rid of Amnon, his elder brother, on the plea of punishing him for his cruelty to his sister Tamar. For that bloody deed he had to flee, and he was three years with his grandfather in Syria. Then David allowed him back, but it was two years more till he received him into the palace and forgave him. David's fondness was lost upon him. He now set up as a great man at Jerusalem, as the friend of the poor and the oppressed, as a judge who could settle cases better than the king himself. The people were taken in by him. He stole the hearts of the men of Israel and raised a spirit of discontent for his own advantage through all the land. He worked hard (xv. 2) and never grew weary in his wicked work. It would be well for us all if we would work as hard for God as Absalom worked for himself. At last Absalom is seen in his true colours as

III. **A Rebellious Son.**—Our Scottish history tells us how one of our Scottish kings, James IV, took part with the rebels who drove his father, James III, from the throne and killed him. It tells, too, how bitterly he rued it, wearing an iron belt as a penance to the last day of his life. Absalom was heir to the throne since Amnon's death, and would not wait his father's death to get the crown. He gathered round him the men of Israel whose hearts he had stolen, and set up his standard as king of Israel, at Hebron. Men flocked to him, scarcely thinking what they did (2 Sam. xv. 11). He marched upon Jerusalem, and David fled to the other side of Jordan. Ahithophel advised an immediate pursuit, so as to smite David without hurting his men, and Absalom approved; so cruel and heartless he had become. His men, however, preferred the advice of Hushai, to be careful how they attacked a warrior so brave as David. Meanwhile David's friends rallied round him, and soon he was able to offer battle to Absalom and his rebel host.

It is beautiful to read how David's captains and men looked up to their warrior king. They would not let him lead in person, for they said his life was too precious to be put in danger. 'Thou art worth ten thousand of us' (xviii. 3). So Joab and Abishai and Ittai led the attack, and David's only command was, 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.' What a contrast David's affection and tenderness to Absalom's cruelty and heartlessness! In the battle, the rebels were scattered over the wood of Ephraim, and Absalom fled like the rest. Selfish men are usually cowardly, and he was perhaps the first to flee. As the mule that carried him rushed through the oak forest Absalom's hair caught in the boughs, and he was left with his feet lifted up from the earth. One of David's soldiers found him, but remembering David's charge not to hurt Absalom, he let him alone. When Joab came up he sent three darts through him, and ten young men of his company finished him. Tell how the news came to David, and how he wept over the death of his fondly loved but rebellious son.

What a wretched end to a vain and selfish life! what a contrast is Absalom, dying in rebellion against his own father, in pursuit of his own selfish ends, to his father's friend Jonathan, loyal to his wilful father Saul to the end, and dying with him at last in battle against the enemies of their country!

What are the chief lessons of this dark story?

1. It is pleasant to be beautiful and to be much thought of, but beauty without God's grace may puff up with pride, may lead to selfishness, and may become a fatal snare (Prov. xxxi. 30; 1 John ii. 16).

2. To be unkind to parents is a bad sign of character, and cannot lead to respect and honour, but rather to unhappiness and misery (Prov. xxxi. 17; Exod. xx. 12).

3. David's grief for Absalom is an image of the sorrow which is in the heart of our Heavenly Father when His rebellious children perish in their sins (Hosea xi. 8; 1 John ii. 12).

XXVI.—SOLOMON'S WISE CHOICE

1 Kings iii. 4-15

Introduction.—In last lesson we heard about the troubles which David had with his sons. Mention the names of the two who tried him most. What was their fate? How did their father feel about them? To-day we are to hear about another of David's sons in whom he had greater comfort. He had named the son about whom we heard in last lesson Absalom ('father of peace'), but Absalom it was who broke the peace of the kingdom and drove his father for a time from the throne. The subject of this lesson was named Solomon ('the peaceful'), and he fulfilled all his father's desires and hopes. In him two great promises of God to David were to be fulfilled, and one of them could be fulfilled only by a man of peace. What were these promises (2 Sam. vii. 12, 13; 1 Kings v. 3)? So when David was old and about to die, he wished to see Solomon anointed king. When this was done (1 Kings i. 38, 39) David told him of the plans he had formed, but was not allowed to carry out, for building a house for God. How touching a scene! The old warrior, on his deathbed, committing to his son this scheme which had been so near his heart (2 Sam. vii. 1 ff.), and giving him instructions what to do. How was this scheme fulfilled (1 Kings vi.)? So when David died Solomon reigned in his stead.

Solomon was quite young when he was made king in room of his father —perhaps not more than fifteen, certainly not more than twenty. This was very young to mount a throne with all its cares. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown'—and when it is so young a head it is more uneasy still. [Think of Queen Victoria called to the throne of Britain at eighteen, and to an empire far grander than Solomon's. She said to her Council on taking the crown, that only with the help of God could she hope to wear it well. And God helped her!] Solomon felt the cares of his kingdom to be great, and far beyond his strength; but he took the right way by acknowledging God at the very beginning. At the beginning of his reign Solomon went to Gibeon to sacrifice there. The brazen altar was there, and the tabernacle, and Solomon wished by offering sacrifices to show his love to God and his desire to serve Him. So he offered a thousand burnt-offerings, and by the magnificence of his gifts he showed his people how anxious he was to glorify God and to serve Him. His thoughts were full of the service of God by night as well as by day. In this frame of mind God appeared to him in a dream, and made him a great offer. [When we feel thankful to God for His goodness, we are in the right spirit for receiving still more.] God knew what was in Solomon's heart, how anxious he was to be a good king, and now He appears to him in a dream by night and says, 'Ask what I shall give thee.'

I. **God's Offer** (v. 5).—'Ask what I shall give thee.' Think how difficult it is for a child to make up its mind when asked to choose one of a number of beautiful toys. What a variety of tastes come out in such a case! Suppose some good and powerful fairy were to say to you as you lay awake at night, 'I give you your choice of a career; whatever you want to be, I can make you; ask what I shall give thee!' One would say, 'Make me

rich'; another, 'Make me a king'; another, 'Make me a great discoverer.' Perhaps one here and there might say, 'Oh, good fairy, the choice is so difficult, choose thou for me what I shall be!' Fairies belong entirely to the world of fancy. Here was God Himself, who owns all and is all-powerful, offering to Solomon whatever he should ask. It was a grand opportunity, and Solomon would show what sort of man he was by the way he used it.

II. **Good Things which Solomon might have asked** (v. 11).—1. *Long life.*—This was a gift which the ancients coveted greatly. They knew so little about another life that they were always eager to have as much as they could of this. 'That thy days may be long in the land,' was God's promise to those who kept the fifth commandment. It would have been natural for Solomon to ask long life, to carry out his plans for the good of his people and the service of God.

2. *Riches.*—Solomon was rich already, for all the gold and the treasures of his father David were his. But he would need a great deal of money to build the temple and to keep up his court. Nobody could have blamed Solomon had he asked for riches.

3. *Victory.*—Solomon knew how sweet a thing power is. No doubt it would have been pleasant to get to himself a larger kingdom by conquering the nations round about. And he knew that victory could come from God alone.

4. *Honour.*—To be held in honour and to be beloved by his people is a right thing, a noble thing, for a king to strive after. [Think how Queen Victoria is honoured and loved. There are sovereigns who are afraid to move lest they should be attacked and killed.]

These are all good things upon which we might without blame set our hearts. But they are not the best things. *Long life* might be unhappy; *riches* might take wings and fly away; *victory* might only end in vanity and pride, or cruelty and oppression; *honour* might be forfeited in some foolish moment.

III. **The Best Thing which Solomon did ask** (vv. 6-10).—Solomon rose above every selfish desire, and asked what would benefit his people as well as himself. He thought, too, not merely of the interest of the nation, but of the glory of God. He asked for no mere worldly good, but for something truly spiritual—the gift of **an understanding heart.** Observe some things about this choice.

1. *It was what he felt most in need of.*—Without wisdom and understanding all those good things would have been of little use to him. He needed wisdom to use them well and to judge his people rightly. Other good things were only ciphers till this was placed before them as a figure to give them value. So too with us. Without the new heart,—long life, riches, power, honour might be a snare to us. Without Christ, the whole world were worthless (Mark viii. 36).

2. *It was an unselfish choice.*—By this choice Solomon brought prosperity to his people (1 Kings iv. 25). His fame for wisdom went into far countries and made Israel famous (1 Kings x. 1). Young people when choosing a career in life should seek one in which they may not only win comfort for themselves, but may serve and bless others.

3. *It carried with it the good things he might have asked.*—God was so

pleased with his choice that He gave him riches and honour and power besides, and long life if he followed God fully. And Jesus says to us still, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matt. vi. 33). To be a true follower of Jesus turns everything into a blessing.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

Does God still make us an offer like this which He made to Solomon? Yes. Jesus said, 'Ask, and it shall be given you.' What is the best thing to ask? Just what Solomon asked, **an understanding heart.** Only we shall get it in a higher degree. It is the great blessing of Christ's kingdom: 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh' (Ezek. xxxvi. 26).

XXVII.—THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S VISIT TO SOLOMON

1 Kings x. 1-13 (compare Matt. xii. 42)

Introduction.—Solomon was now in the height of his power and glory as the king of Israel. For greatness and splendour Solomon's reign far outshone the reigns of Saul and David, and it was never equalled by the reign of any of the kings after him. The secret of Solomon's power and greatness is not far to seek. We learned it in last lesson. Let us recall the dream in which God appeared to him. What offer did God make to him? What was Solomon's choice? What did God promise over and above? How did God fulfil His promise (1 Kings iv. 20-34; x. 26-29)? So Israel enjoyed peace with the nations round about and good government under the wise rule of Solomon. [No better illustration of this than the peace and prosperity we enjoy under Queen Victoria.] In times of peace kings are free to promote the wellbeing of their realm. Solomon reared *great buildings*. What was the greatest of these (1 Kings vi.)? For whom was it built (1 Kings viii.)? Solomon encouraged *trade with distant nations*. Where did his ships go, and what did they bring (1 Kings ix. 26-28; x. 22)? Solomon kept up *a magnificent court* and *gathered vast wealth*. How many chariots had he (1 Kings x. 26)? What is said about the abundance of silver (x. 21-27)? Solomon's riches and splendour and power and wisdom became a proverb. Who speaks of 'Solomon in all his glory' (Matt. vi. 29)?

I. **The Fame of Solomon.**—Solomon had not been long on the throne till his riches and grandeur and wisdom became the talk of the neighbouring peoples, and even of distant nations. He had married Pharaoh's daughter and established trade with Egypt, and so his fame was carried far up the ancient Nile. He built Tadmor in the wilderness on the road to the Euphrates, and so his fame would be carried down to the Persian Gulf. His ships, trading with Mediterranean ports, with the Red Sea, and even with the Indian Ocean to Ophir, carried his fame along all these coasts.

Although there were no railways, nor steamboats, nor telegraphs in those days, the ships on the seas, and the camels and mules through the deserts, would carry goods—gold and spices and precious stones—from far lands to Jerusalem, and take back with them reports of Solomon's greatness. Men would talk of the city where silver was as plentiful as the stones on the streets; of the king whose wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East; of the temple he had reared; and of the God, so holy and good, whom he feared and worshipped. So the fame of Solomon went forth into all lands. 'And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom' (1 Kings iv. 34).

II. **The Queen of Sheba's Visit.**—There was a great queen whose curiosity brought her from a distant land. Whether Sheba was far up the Nile, near Khartoum, or, more likely, in Arabia, she had a long way to come. She had heard about Solomon—about his wisdom, about his temple, and about his God. She 'heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord' (v. 1). She thought she might learn

from Solomon something about the Living and True God which would satisfy the deepest longings of her heart. She felt her need of God, and she was really an anxious inquirer after Him. She did not come empty-handed, but like a great queen to a great king. She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and precious stones, as presents for Solomon. She was a great queen, and she gave splendid presents—'there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon' (v. 10). Her visit would create a stir in Jerusalem. [The visit of the Shah of Persia to this country, the sights he saw, the presents he left and received, help to illustrate the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem.] She had great sights to see—the temple, the royal palace, the ivory throne (1 Kings x. 18-20), the numerous attendants, and Solomon's 'ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord'—and these wonders so astonished her, that 'there was no more spirit in her' (v. 5). Most of all, she was struck with the wisdom of the king. He answered all her questions—told her much about God and heavenly things which made her a wiser woman than when she came. Great as were the reports of Solomon's riches and wisdom that reached her in her own land, she declared the half had not been told her, and she congratulated the servants of Solomon who lived with him, and daily heard his wisdom (vv. 6-9).

III. **The Greater than Solomon.**—Jesus said, 'the Queen of the South came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here' (Matt. xii. 42). Jesus is greater than Solomon. Think of—

1. **His kingdom.**—It is 'from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth' (Ps. lxxii. 8). It is not only over lands but hearts; it is 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.' In our own land, in India, in Africa, in China, in America, and in the Isles of the sea, He has His subjects. Good men and women who have become missionaries are ever enlarging the boundaries of His kingdom.

2. **His fame.**—The name of Jesus is on the lips of millions over all the earth. It has reached the most barbarous of earth's tribes, and is being inquired after by men and women who have long lived in heathen darkness. And He is known as the Saviour of sinners, as the Divine Teacher, as the Prince of Peace. Multitudes can tell from their own experience of His love and grace and power, and when people come to Him and really know Him, they say, like the Queen of Sheba, that the half has not been told.

3. **His wisdom.**—He reveals to us God. 'Never man spake like this man' (John vii. 46). Greeks came to learn of Him (John xii. 21). Mary sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word (Luke x. 39).

4. **His service.**—There is no service like His. His servants may well be happy and proud of the best of Masters. They would not exchange it for the world. To serve one who is at once the King of kings and the kindest of friends is a privilege indeed. Even little children are made welcome to Him, and may serve Him from their earliest years.

5. **His invitation.**—The Queen of Sheba only heard of Solomon and came uninvited. See how hearty a welcome she received. But we are invited. We know to Whom we are coming. Jesus invites us to come.

He says, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden' (Matt. xi. 28); 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' (Isa. lv. 1). We have no long journey to take to reach Him, for He is at hand to hear and help and save. He calls us not only to see His glory but to share it with Him; not only to visit, but to abide with Him.

6. **His glory.**—His glory is seen in His grace on earth, and it will be revealed in all its splendour in heaven. When those who have heard of His glory here, see it and share it hereafter, they too will declare that the half had not been told. Think much of Him who is greater than Solomon.

'His name shall be the Prince of Peace,
For evermore adored,
The Wonderful, the Counsellor,
The great and mighty Lord.
His power increasing still shall spread,
His reign no end shall know;
Justice shall guard His throne above,
And peace abound below.'

Is it wonderful, then, that Jesus said, the Queen of the South shall condemn us, if we reject Him (Matt. xii. 42)? The faint glimmer that had reached her in distant Sheba was eagerly welcomed, and led her to further light. We live in the day when the Sun of Righteousness is shining brightly: how shall we answer to God at the last, if we shut our eyes to Him and abide in the darkness of sin?

XXVIII.—REHOBOAM: THE ADVICE GIVEN HIM, HOW HE USED IT, AND THE RESULTS

1 Kings xii. 1-20

Introduction.—We have heard in past lessons of the glory, and power, and wisdom of Solomon. What was the secret of his greatness (1 Kings iii. 11-13)? To-day we are to see how Solomon's kingdom was broken in two by the folly of his son. And yet the folly of Rehoboam was only the occasion of the break-up. God allowed his folly to take its course, and so fulfil the threat of His prophet to Solomon, that on account of his disobedience the kingdom would be rent out of the hand of his son (1 Kings xi. 9-13).

For Solomon's reign, though glorious and prosperous, had a dark side. Just look at this dark side. (1) His heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel (1 Kings xi. 9). He gave himself up to a life of pleasure. His wives turned his heart in his old age after other gods (1 Kings xi. 4, 5). (2) The influence of Solomon's godless and pleasure-seeking court had the worst effect upon the people. Upon the younger people it had a very bad effect. They grew up fond of pleasure and ease, selfish and proud and thoughtless. This is often the case when wealth abounds, and with Solomon's bad example before them, it was little wonder the young grew up to love pleasure and ease better than work and duty. And what were splendour and glory, while men were growing up in selfishness and vice, in extravagance and pleasure? (3) The spirit of discontent was spreading among the people. They didn't like to see their king entirely given up to pleasure. They liked worse to have to pay taxes to keep up his wives and his costly enjoyments. They now learned, as Samuel had warned them long before, some of the disadvantages of having another king but God (1 Sam. viii. 10-18). The fire was already smouldering which would soon blaze out in open rebellion. A leader was ready in the person of Jeroboam (1 Kings xi. 26-40), and the tribe of Ephraim was ready to strike a blow for relief.

I. **Rehoboam King** (vv. 1-5).—Solomon's death was the signal for the outbreak of discontent. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king. He was Solomon's only son. But he had learned little from the wisdom of his father. His mother being an Ammonitess, he would learn nothing from her about Jehovah (1 Kings xi. 5). By and by he made companions of the young men in Jerusalem, and now that he was forty he was ill fitted to be a king. Where did Israel meet to pay homage to Rehoboam (1 Kings xii. 1)? Was this the capital? No, Jerusalem was the capital, but Shechem was the chief city of Ephraim, to which Jeroboam belonged. What were they resolved upon before acknowledging Rehoboam as king? To tell him their grievances. Who was their spokesman? So they assembled at Shechem from all parts of the land to ask for redress. [Illustrate by the English Barons meeting King John at Runnymede.] How did they express themselves? It was a critical moment, and perhaps it was wise in Rehoboam to take three days to consider and obtain advice. He little knew how much hung upon the

action he took. If ever a man needed wisdom from above, Rehoboam needed it now.

II. **The Advice given Him** (vv. 6-11).—No sign here that he turned to the God of Israel for advice. How unlike his father's counsel! 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths' (Prov. iii. 6). How unlike his grandfather, the Psalmist King! 'I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears' (Ps. xxxiv. 4). See what advice was given him.

1. *Good advice.*—To whom did he turn first? What did they say? This was wise counsel: 'Speak good words to the people and they will be thy servants for ever.' This was the soft answer which turneth away wrath (Prov. xv. 1). It was what might have been expected from those who had learned from Solomon. If Rehoboam had taken the advice he might have sat upon the throne of an undivided Israel. But Rehoboam asked other advice.

2. *Bad advice.*—To whom did he turn now? What was their advice? This was just what might have been expected of them: 'Say to them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins: My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions' (scorpions being scourges with sharp points in them drawing blood). This advice would be thought clever, although it was utterly heartless and shortsighted. 'Bully the people well,' they said, 'and you will have no more trouble with their complaints.' Whose advice did Rehoboam follow? The peace of his kingdom now depends upon his choice.

III. **How he used it** (vv. 12-15).—At the end of three days the people gathered again at Shechem, with Jeroboam at their head. They were in no mood to be trifled with. They were eager to know Rehoboam's mind as to their petition. When Rehoboam appears before them there is a hush of silence till he speaks. When he does speak it is in a rough voice, with harsh and bullying words. He has cast off the old men who gave him good advice, and followed the young men who gave him bad advice. This was very foolish. It is foolish to despise the counsel of those who are older than ourselves. It is always a bad account of children when they will take their own way and pay no heed to the advice of parents, or friends wiser than themselves. This was what Rehoboam did. 'My father made your yoke heavy,' he said, 'I will make it heavier. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.' These were the words of a bully, though he was a king. He was not the man to talk so big, and he mistook the temper of the men of Ephraim to whom he spoke.

IV. **The Results** (vv. 16-30).—The men of Ephraim at once kindled into open rebellion. 'What portion have we in David?' they cried. Why should we take this man for our king because he is of the tribe of Judah and in the line of Jesse? 'To your tents, O Israel!' Let no homage be paid to this tyrant! Let us fight for liberty, if we must. Rehoboam now saw his folly. He sent Adoram, perhaps to offer other terms to the angry people, but they stoned him to death. Rehoboam, afraid for his life—for tyrants are mostly cowards—rode off in his chariot to Jerusalem. And what was the end of all this? That ten tribes set up a kingdom of their own with

Jeroboam for king. What tribes were left? How did it fare with them? They had the king of David's line: they had Jerusalem with the temple: they had the worship of God in its purity. But it was an unhappy breach. The one chosen people of God split into two, often at enmity and open strife, and sadly weakened by the division between them!

SPIRITUAL LESSON

Rehoboam's troubles all arose from his not seeking wisdom at its true source. It was well to seek advice from the old men. And young men are not always so foolish as they were here. But there is a better way. What does the Psalmist of Israel say? **'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'** (Ps. cxi. 10). And how are we to get wisdom? Listen to St. James (i. 5). What does he say, too, of the character of wisdom (Jas. iii. 17)? **The wisdom which is from above would save us from the folly that leads to strife, and would make us gentle and kind in word and deed.**

'When deep within our swelling hearts
The thoughts of pride and anger rise,
When bitter words are on our tongues,
And tears of passion in our eyes.
Then may we stay the angry blow,
Then may we check the hasty word,
Give gentle answers back again,
And fight a battle for our Lord.'

XXIX.—ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL

1 Kings xviii. 17-46

Introduction.—In one of our lessons lately it was said that Samuel was the first of the prophetic order which became so powerful in Israel. If Samuel was the first, Elijah was the greatest. Whom did he stand beside on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke ix. 30, 31)? You remember the difference between the work of a priest and that of a prophet (Lesson XXI.) The prophet spoke to man on behalf of God. How did he do this? (1) He told things that were to come in the future, and (2) he spoke against wickedness and sin, in high or low, in king or people. The prophet needed **faith** to receive God's message, and to cleave to Him constantly; **courage** to face danger and hardship; **love** to the nation to see wherein lay its highest good. Elijah had all these qualities in a high degree. They made him one of the grandest champions of God and righteousness that have ever been. [The same is true in large measure of the great men of God of modern times who have been as God's prophets to their generation: Luther, John Knox, and others.]

I. **The Champion** (vv. 17, 18).—Elijah had been born and brought up among the rugged hills of Gilead. He fulfilled his mission as a prophet in the kingdom of Israel. You remember about the breach between Judah and the rest of the tribes? How did it come about? How many tribes were comprised under the kingdom of Israel? In the kingdom of Israel the worship of God had fallen low. What means had been taken to keep it up apart from the temple (1 Kings xii. 28 ff.)? Ahab, who was now on the throne, was not content with the worship of the golden calves, but reared up an altar for Baal (1 Kings xvi. 32, 33), and practised the idolatry which his wife Jezebel of Sidon loved. The people were only too ready to follow the sinful lead which was thus given to them. So greatly did Ahab provoke God to anger that He sent Elijah to tell him of a great drought that would last three years over all the land. During those years great hardship was felt. Elijah himself was fed by ravens at the brook Cherith till its waters failed. Then he lived with a widow woman at Zarephath, whose barrel of meal did not waste and whose cruse of oil did not fail according to God's promise. There was a sore famine even in Samaria, where Ahab's palace stood. All this helped to show the people the folly of departing from God. Ere the drought gave way Elijah went to show himself to Ahab, and now a great effort was to be made to rouse the people from their indifference and bring them back to faith in the living God.

II. **The Challenge.**—Picture the haughty king and the rugged prophet with hairy mantle and leathern girdle standing face to face.

1. *To Ahab* (vv. 19, 20).—Ahab says to Elijah, 'Art thou the troubler of Israel?' At once Elijah casts back the taunt: 'It is not I that have brought famine on the land, but thou by thy disobedience and thy worship of other gods.' Then he bade him gather together all Israel and the prophets who kept up the worship of the false gods. Did Ahab do this? Yes, he could not do otherwise. Such was the prophet's power over the king that it

was done, and they were gathered upon Carmel. [Elijah before Ahab so dauntless reminds us of John Knox. It was said over his grave, 'There lies he who never feared the face of man.' The greatest preacher of the Early Church once sent a message to his sovereign: 'Go, tell the Empress that I fear nothing but sin.']

2. *To the people* (vv. 21-24).—To Carmel all the children of Israel have come at the summons of Ahab. The people had drifted into carelessness and idolatry, and now Elijah had a chance of rousing them. 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' was his question. 'If Jehovah be God, follow Him: but if Baal, follow him.' You can picture to yourselves the people bowing their heads as they felt the force of his rebuke. It was like a boy or a girl feeling guilty of wrong. It was so true. They were neither cold nor hot (Rev. iii. 16). And they answered him not a word.

3. *To the false prophets* (v. 25).—Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were gathered for the occasion, and four hundred prophets of the groves along with them. Elijah proposed a test to them. Let them sacrifice a bullock and call upon Baal. He would sacrifice a bullock and call upon Jehovah. They would pray Baal for fire to come down and burn up their sacrifice; he would pray Jehovah for fire to come from heaven and burn up his. The people heard this test, and thought it perfectly fair, so they cried, 'It is well spoken.' There is nothing like a test of reality. [A young woman who had doubts about God acted upon the promise, 'Ask, and it shall be given you,' and found that God heard her, and she believed in His name.]

III. **The Contest.**—Now the trial begins. See how it proceeds.

1. *The action of the prophets of Baal* (vv. 26-29).—They do as Elijah proposed and then they cry to their god to send fire. See them first leaping up and down around the altar, but no answer. Elijah in sarcasm bids them cry louder; perhaps their god is from home, or asleep, or engaged! He wants to make them feel the folly of crying to a god who is nothing at all. So they cry louder, and then they cut themselves with knives till the blood flows forth. From morning to mid-day, and from mid-day to afternoon, they cry, but there is no answer, no voice, and no fire from heaven. What else were they to expect? It showed those people clearly the folly of crying to a god who did not exist (read in this connection Isa. xliv. 9 ff.; xlvi. 1-4).

2. *The action of Elijah* (vv. 30-37).—First he bade the people come near him, and see that there was no deception. Then he found an old altar to Jehovah, and taking twelve stones he built it up again in the name of the Lord. Why twelve stones? According to the twelve tribes of Israel, as if true worship of the God of Israel could recognise no division like that which separated the kingdom of Judah and the ten tribes. Then he got water from the well in the hill, and poured it over the offering and the altar, still to make clear that there was no deception. At the time of the evening sacrifice he offered up his prayer. He knows that at the temple in Jerusalem a peace-offering is then being made. See how careful he is to observe the proper forms, and notice how his prayer is to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. This is the covenant God, who has often answered the cry of His people, who has appointed sacrifice as the way of coming to Him, and who is sure to hear. When God has answered our prayers

before, we have the more confidence in coming to Him again. Elijah uses few words and does all quietly, and orderly, and alone. But he is strong in the faith of God. Will Jehovah hear him?

IV. **The Victory** (vv. 38-46).—Elijah had not long to wait. His cry entered into the ear of the living God, and He would not leave His faithful prophet without a token. 'Hear me, O Lord, hear me,' is his cry. Forthwith the fire of the Lord fell and burnt up the bullock and the altar; it even burnt up the stones and the water in the ditch round about.

You may imagine the awe that came upon the people. They fell upon their faces and cried, 'Jehovah, He is God; Jehovah, He is God.' The test resulted in favour of Jehovah and Elijah, and Baal and his prophets were brought into utter discredit.

It was a deed of stern judgment, but it showed still further the weakness of the cause of Baal, when Elijah took the prophets down to the river-side and slew them there. Their god did nothing to save them! When this idolatry was swept from the land, the drought was at an end, and the rain was at hand. By the time Ahab had got to his palace at Jezreel, Elijah running before his chariot all the way, there was a great rain. By judgment and by mercy God was seeking to win the people. Alas! their fear and their acknowledgments of Him were shortlived. They were only for a little while roused from their indifference, but they were bound to admit that He was indeed the living God.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

God wants us to test Him by prayer. Jesus said, 'Ask, and it shall be given you.' A business man speaks into a tube and gets back an answer from a mile away in a few seconds. His words have entered the ear of the person addressed. And God says, 'Before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking, I will hear' (Isa. lxv. 24). When we have thus learned that God is, and that Christ's word is true, we ought to throw our whole heart into His service. To be undecided for Christ is to be on the side of the world and of Satan. Listen to the challenge again: 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' 'To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

XXX.—ELIJAH IN THE CAVE ON MOUNT SINAI

1 Kings xix. 1-18

Introduction.—Our lesson opens to-day by showing us a man who sits under a juniper tree—a kind of broom—praying that he might die. He is alone in the wilderness, far from the dwellings of men, and is the very picture of weariness and sadness and grief. He has a hairy mantle about his shoulders, a leathern girdle round his waist, and a weatherbeaten face as he looks up into the blazing sky. Have we seen him before? Can it be Elijah, so far from Carmel, so unlike the victorious prophet whom we last saw running before Ahab's chariot to Jezreel? It is just he, and our passage to-day tells us how he is there, and what further befell him.

I. **Elijah fleeing** (vv. 1-8).—What made Elijah flee? It was the anger of Jezebel, Ahab's wicked queen. She vowed that he should die, because he had slain her prophets. When this came to Elijah's ears, he was afraid, and fled out of the land of Israel till now he was nearly beyond the land of Canaan altogether. Could God not have kept Elijah from harm? Certainly. He saved him from the hand of Ahab, He had kept him through the famine, and He could have kept him still. God's faithfulness had not failed, but Elijah's faith had failed. So it has often been even with God's noblest servants. Abraham's faith failed once and he told a lie (Gen. xx. 2); John the Baptist in his prison had doubts (Matt. xi. 2, 3). It was wrong of Elijah to distrust God and flee. But did God therefore forsake him? No! God is too kind to leave His weary servants to themselves (Ps. ciii. 8-13).

Look at Elijah now. He has passed Beersheba, and is hastening to the Mount of God in the wilderness where the Israelites wandered so long. If Elijah was fleeing, he was seeking places where God had revealed Himself of old. At Beersheba, to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; at Mount Sinai, to Moses and the Israelites, giving them the law. See him

1. *Weary and sad.*—He is tired with his long journey. He has left his servant at Beersheba, and now he is all alone. He is sore at heart. He thinks God's cause is lost. He believes that wrong is getting the better of right, and that evil is to win the day. He thinks he alone is faithful in Israel, and now he is ready to die. Was he right in this? We shall see. Nothing pains a good man more than to see God's cause trodden down by the wicked in power.

2. *Comforted and fed.*—Elijah had prayed that he might die, and God answered him by sending His angel,—not to take him home to Himself, but to cheer and rouse him for further service in Israel. He had fallen into a sleep, and as he slept the angel touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat.' And what did Elijah see when he looked? A fire, and bread which had been baked on it, and water close to his head. Far away, in the wilderness, God's eye saw the lonely man, and God sent an angel to save His prophet. What do we read about angels in the New Testament (Heb. i. 14; Matt. xviii. 10)? Elijah ate and drank and slept again. And the angel touched him again, and said, 'Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for thee.'

And now a wonderful thing happened! There was no food to be had

where he was, and so forty days and forty nights he journeyed in the strength of what the angel gave him. In this, Elijah was like Moses in the same place (Exod. xxxiv. 28), and like a greater than Moses who was in the wilderness and fasted forty days and forty nights (Matt. iv. 1, 2).

II. **God revealing Himself** (vv. 9-18).—At last Elijah came to Mount Horeb. It was the Mount of God, where God had given the ten commandments long before to Moses, Mount Sinai being one of the peaks of Horeb. And God was to make Himself known to Elijah as he had done to Moses. Notice

1. *The question.*—'What doest thou here, Elijah?' It was the word of the Lord that came to him to rebuke his faithlessness as he lodged in a cave of the mountain—perhaps the same in which Moses stood when God's glory passed by (Exod. xxxiii. 22). God's eye was upon him there as upon Hagar in the wilderness (Gen. xvi. 13), upon Jeremiah in his dungeon (Jer. xxxiii. 1), and upon Jonah asleep in the ship (Jon. ii. 6). What was Elijah's answer? Was he right? Only so far, as we shall see. God told him to go forth and stand on the mount before the Lord,—to receive God's message. But before he left the cave a great manifestation of God's power was given him. First a great *wind* blew and brake the rocks in pieces. Then an *earthquake* shook the mountain. After that the *lightning* flashed and blazed among the granite peaks. God was in none of these terrible elements; but they were at His command, and they went before Him to show Elijah how strong He was to punish evil and to protect His servants.

Then there came a still small *voice*. It was the Voice of God. It was the same voice as had called Samuel so gently (Lesson XXI.) that he mistook it for the voice of the kind old high priest, Eli. It told Elijah that now he was in the presence of God Himself, and he drew his mantle over his face, and went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave upon the mount. The gentle voice had more awe for Elijah than the wind and the lightning and the earthquake. [The voice of a kind mother has often a greater effect than threats and punishments. A kind word has sometimes moved a bad man when the sentence of the law had no effect.] It went to his heart as these could never do. The Voice now asked in gentler tones, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' Elijah answered as before, but we may be sure he now felt rebuked for fleeing,—as if God could not have kept him safe even at the court of Ahab! He had learned God's power and care and love as he had never done before.

2. *The command.*—Though the prophet's faith had failed, God did not dismiss him from His service. He gave him new knowledge of Himself, and then more work to do. How good God is, and how patient! It was thus that Jesus gave the Apostle Peter work to do for Him, even though his faith had failed and he had denied Him with curses (John xxi. 15-17). Now God bade Elijah go and anoint Hazael king over Syria, and Jehu king over Israel, and Elisha to be prophet to carry on his work after he had gone. So far was God's cause from being lost, that here was God showing His plans for carrying it further than before.

3. *The encouragement.*—Elijah thought he was the only man in Israel that feared and served the Lord. How glad he must have been to hear that

God had still seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal! God sees His own, even when His servants know them not. What a blessing it is there are more good people in the world than we know! This should make us think more kindly of people generally. From the Mount of God Elijah returned with higher thoughts of God and brighter hopes for man.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

God's **eye** is upon you wherever you are, and you cannot get away from **His presence.** Would you always like to hear God saying, **What doest thou here?** To some it would be a **rebuke,** to the true and faithful it would be an **encouragement.** 'If you would flee from God, flee to God,' was the advice of an ancient saint.

'Amidst the deepest shades of night
Can there be One who sees my way?
Yes, God is like the shining light,
And turns the darkness into day.

'He smiles in heaven, He frowns in hell,
He fills the air, the earth, the sea,
I must within His presence dwell,
I cannot from His anger flee.

'Yet I may flee, He shows me where,
To Jesus Christ He bids me fly,
And while I seek for pardon there,
There's only mercy in His eye.'

XXXI.—ASCENT OF ELIJAH INTO HEAVEN

2 Kings ii. 1-15

Introduction.—Although the life of Elijah was full of wonders—recall the ravens feeding him (1 Kings xvii. 6); the scene at Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 20); God appearing to him at Horeb (1 Kings xix. 11, 12)—its close was most wonderful of all. How do men pass out of this life? What is the last thing spoken of the long-lived people before the flood (Gen. v. 5, 8, 11 ff.)? Was this said of them all? There was one exception: 'Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him' (Gen. v. 24). Enoch did not die (Heb. xi. 5), but was translated. The same happened to Elijah,—to these two and to none besides of all the human family.

Elijah did not die, but was translated—carried up into heaven in the wonderful manner described to us here. What an honour was thus done to him! Once, you remember, he prayed under the juniper tree in the wilderness that he might die and get away from his troubles and disappointments (1 Kings xix. 4). But God had a more glorious departure in store for His weary servant. Sometimes God's people are weary in the struggle against sin, and think they will never be fit for heaven. And God in His great mercy gives them at the last a translation too—not, indeed, by carrying them up to heaven in a chariot of fire, but by giving them a calm and peaceful death.

I. **The Home Call** (v. 1).—Elijah's work had been stern and hard. He had put the false prophets to death; he had called down fire from heaven upon the companies of Ahaziah; he had pronounced doom upon King Ahab and his wicked queen, Jezebel. He had lived a lonely life, with neither wife nor child to love. On earth he had scarcely had a home. But he had walked with God, and now God was to call him home to His presence above. God had said to Moses, 'Get thee up into this mountain and die' (Deut. xxxii. 49). How God told Elijah we cannot say, but Elijah felt and knew that his departure was at hand. Heaven is the home of all God's children; earth is the place where work is done and training given; when these are finished it is time to go. Elijah had heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Come up hither,' and he was ready to go.

II. **The Homeward Journey** (vv. 2-10).—It was a touching sight to see the Duke of Wellington, the hero of a hundred fights, take his last ride, old and feeble and ready to die, from Horse Guards to his house near Hyde Park, in London. So it is touching to see Elijah taking his last journey and paying his last visits. Picture him bidding farewell to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Jericho, and the schools of the prophets there. Who is this that goes with him? Has his companion any idea of what is to happen? Yes (vv. 3, 5), for he follows him closely, and will not let him out of his sight. But he could not bear to hear it spoken about.

Down towards the river Jordan Elijah and Elisha went, and the young prophets who had often heard his words, knowing that something wonderful was to happen, viewed them afar off. When they came to the river a wonder was seen. The river runs swift and deep, but Elijah folded up his

mantle and struck the waters with it, so that a path was made through them, and they went over on the dry bottom. Sometimes when a man is dying, and a friend stands beside his bed, he asks, 'Can I leave you anything to keep me in remembrance?' This was what Elijah did now. 'What shall I do for thee before I go?' he asks Elisha. And Elisha asked for a double portion of his master's spirit,—asking really, as the eldest son got a double portion, to be considered Elijah's son and heir in Israel. This was a great thing to ask. On what terms did Elijah promise it? If he saw Elijah taken up, he was to know and be sure that it was granted. So Elisha walked close beside his master.

III. **The Welcome Home** (vv. 11, 12).—You can see the two climbing the hillside beyond the Jordan and talking together. It was on these hills that Moses stood and beheld in the distance the Promised Land he was not to enter. Perhaps Elijah had that in his mind as he talked with Elisha. They would talk, at least, of God and heaven, and of God's great goodness and love, no doubt. But now, as they turn their eyes upwards, what do they see? A chariot and horses of fire! 'The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands upon thousands' (Ps. lxviii. 17, Revised Version), and God had sent a chariot to fetch the faithful prophet home. In the twinkling of an eye, Elisha beheld his master taken from his side and borne upwards with the swiftness of a whirlwind towards heaven. And he cried, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof'—thinking that Elijah had been more than chariots and horsemen to Israel while he was on earth. And he saw him no more. **What had become of Elijah?**

He had gone to the rest of heaven, to the company of the blessed, changed as he went to be fit for the presence of the angels and of God. So the people of God will be changed, without dying, when the Lord Jesus shall come again, and they shall rise to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. iv. 16-18). For an idea of Elijah's welcome home read the welcome of Christian and Hopeful to the Celestial City in the *The Pilgrim's Progress*: '*And as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them; and, behold, the City shone like the Sun, the Streets also were paved with Gold, and in them walked many men, with Crowns on their heads, Palms in their hands, and Golden Harps to sing praises withal . . . which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.*'

When people thought of Elijah thus taken up they got an idea what it is to live for ever. And since Jesus has ascended we have far clearer light upon the life beyond. [Beza said when Calvin died, 'Now is heaven more dear, and coming death less dreadful.'] Nine hundred years after being carried up into heaven, Elijah still lived. When Jesus was transfigured there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory and spake of the *decease—the departure*—He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Moses represents the law, and Elijah represents the prophets; and what an honour it was to them to stand with the Messiah whom they dimly foresaw, shining in the brightness of His glorified Person!

IV. **The Parting Gift** (vv. 13-15).—As Elijah went up into heaven his mantle fell from him. Elisha picked it up, and coming back to the Jordan he smote the waters with it, and they parted again so that Elisha went over.

Was the power in the mantle? No, but in the Spirit which rested upon him as it had upon Elijah. It was clear to him now that God was with him as He had been before with his master. He knew it himself, and the young prophets saw that they had a master in Elisha as they had had before in Elijah.

We cannot think of Elijah ascending up into heaven without thinking of Jesus ascending from Olivet to His place at the right hand of God. Did He leave any gift to His disciples and His Church? Yes. He gave His Holy Spirit according to His promise (Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 8).

SPIRITUAL LESSON

God has a home in heaven, where all His children who love and serve Him here shall dwell for ever. Jesus is there, the Elder Brother of the family, preparing a place for us,—the same Jesus who took little children in His arms and blessed them—the same Jesus who bore our sins upon the cross, for He shows in glory the marks of the death He died on Calvary. And Enoch and Elijah are there, and the faithful ones of God; a multitude which no man can number. Shall we not follow Elijah in his *faith* and *courage* and *love*, serving God and doing battle against sin? **We may have trials now, but God will make us happy at last and for evermore.**

'There's a home for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
Where Jesus reigns in glory—
A home of peace and joy:
No home on earth is like it,
Nor can with it compare;
For every one is happy,
Nor can be happier there.'

XXXII.—ELISHA CURES NAAMAN OF HIS LEPROSY

2 Kings v. 1-14

Introduction.—Our lesson opens to-day in Damascus, the oldest city of the world, the capital of Syria, the country next to Israel on the north. Damascus was a beautiful green spot on the edge of the wilderness, owing its beauty and greenness to its two clear-flowing rivers Abana and Pharpar. Between Israel and Syria there was often warfare. Ahab died in battle against the Syrians (1 Kings xxii.) Again and again the Syrians went through the land of Israel carrying off cattle, and even taking away men and women and children as slaves, just as is done still in Africa near where our missionaries are. The Syrians did not worship the true God, the God of Israel, but idols of their own. It is a strange thing, then, that in our lesson we should hear of a great Syrian captain being healed of his leprosy through God's prophet Elisha. How this was done is a very interesting and beautiful story.

I. **The Captive Maid and her Faith** (vv. 2, 3).—Once when the Syrians had been fighting against Israel they had carried off a little girl from her home, and sold her as a slave to a noble lady in Damascus. How sad for the little girl! to be away from her father and mother, living among strangers in a strange land, and not at liberty to go back to them again. Was she very unhappy, do you think? It does not seem so. The lady was kind to her, and she loved the lady in return. But what kept her from being unhappy was this: she trusted in the God of Israel, and knew that He could keep her and bless her even in a strange land. Though she was living among heathen she did not forget God; she thought often of Him and of the words she had heard His prophet speak, and of the wonderful works the prophet had done. She reminds us very much of one who was sold as a slave into Egypt, and feared God even among heathen too. Who was that (Gen. xxxix. 1-3)? The little maid was not ashamed to speak of her God and His prophet, and in this way she was able to do a great thing for her master; we shall see what that was in a little.

Just now, think what an example this little girl sets to all. She teaches cheerfulness in the saddest circumstances; she bids young people fear God always, and carry the thought of Him with them wherever they are; she bids them try to be helpful and obliging, so that they may not only be useful to master or mistress, but honour the God whom they profess to serve. We see in this little maid how the youngest even in the darkest place may be a light for God. You remember the hymn—

> 'Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light,
> Like a little candle burning in the night.
> In this world of darkness we must shine,
> You in your small corner and I in mine.'

II. **The Honoured Captain and His Leprosy** (vv. 1, 4-7).—Naaman, the captain of the host of Syria, was much thought of by the king. He had won great victories for him and he was very brave, so the king made him great, gave him presents and titles. [In the same way our Queen gives great

soldiers like the late Lord Napier of Magdala and Lord Wolseley titles and honours.] He rode in his chariot and was looked up to by all. He was very proud of this, and thought himself a great man in Syria (v. 9). Was Naaman perfectly happy with his great success, high rank, and the favour of his king? No! What was wanting? He wanted health; he suffered from a painful disease called leprosy. We often read of lepers in Scripture. Search for a passage about any leper whom Jesus healed. There are many lepers still in some parts of the world. Visitors to Jerusalem see a row of poor, deformed, and wretched lepers sitting near the Jaffa gate. Naaman's was a sad case. He had very sore white places on his body, and nobody could cure him. By and by the disease would grow so painful that he would not be able to walk, and his fingers and toes might even drop off. This was a sad case for any man, especially a man so highly honoured. Possibly he tried cures that were offered him; perhaps he had asked his idols to heal him, but they were helpless nothings.

One day his wife had good news for him. Her little Israelitish maid had told her that the prophet who was in Samaria, the capital of Israel, could easily heal him. Naaman went to the king of Syria about this, and the king gave him a letter to the king of Israel. No doubt the king of Syria thought that the king of Israel could order the prophet who lived in his capital to do whatever he wanted. He did not know that the prophet was God's servant before all else. So Naaman travelled into the land of Israel and came to the king. The king of Israel thought the whole thing a plot against him, as he knew he had no control of Elisha, and it seemed impossible that Naaman should be cured of his leprosy in Israel. What did he say and do? Did he apply to the prophet? It seems not; but Elisha heard of it, and bade the king of Israel send Naaman to him. No true help in trouble, you see, but with God.

III. **The Prophet and his Wonderful Cure** (vv. 8-14).—Naaman was only too glad to go to the prophet; he would do anything and give anything to be quite well again. Notice

1. *Naaman's idea of a cure.*—Naaman thought it necessary to let the man of God know how great a man he was, so he came with his horses and his chariot and his servants in great style to the humble dwelling of Elisha. He thought, too, that he could buy his cure, and he was willing to pay a great price for it. He brought with him gold and silver worth thousands of our money, and costly garments to give to the prophet. He thought, besides, that Elisha would make a great fuss over him, and go through a great ceremony, calling on the name of his God and waving his hand over the sores on his body. In all this Naaman was quite mistaken. We shall see this from

2. *Elisha's idea of a cure.*—Although Elisha had sent word to the king for Naaman to come to him, he did not even come to the door of his house to see him. We may be sure he was not afraid of leprosy; leprosy is hardly an infectious disease. He wished rather to make Naaman humble. He was anxious, too, that in this cure God should be everything and himself nothing; so Elisha merely sent a messenger to him. And what was the cure? 'Go, wash in Jordan seven times.' This was surely a simple cure!

Naaman broke out into a rage when he heard it; the poorest leper in

Israel, he thought, could do that! Were his gold and silver and costly garments, his horses and his chariot, and his letter from the king of so little account? He did not need to come all the way from Damascus for such a cure; he could have washed in Abana and Pharpar, better rivers than all the rivers of Israel! So he turned and would have gone home. His servants, however, were wiser than their master. They bade him at least try the prophet's cure; it was so simple. He would have done a great thing if the prophet had bidden him; why not do this little thing and see what would happen? At last Naaman is humbled and agrees.

See him now going down with all his company to the Jordan, and dipping himself in its stream, once, twice, seven times, as he was bidden. And, behold, the sore places are healed, and his flesh comes 'again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean' (v. 14). What a happy man is Naaman! and how humble! Calls himself Elisha's servant, and believes in Elisha's God. 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel' (v. 15).

And all this came of the word of the little captive maid who believed in God, and was not ashamed, even among heathen, to speak of her God and His prophet.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

Now what are we to learn from this wonderful cure? We learn the **freeness**, the **simplicity**, and the **certainty** of **God's way of salvation.** Leprosy is always in the Bible a type of sin, deep in our nature and not to be cured by man. We are all suffering from the leprosy of sin, but there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness in which we may wash and be clean (Zech. xiii. 1). 'The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John i. 7). We would like to pay a great sum and do some great thing, or to get some great thing done over us, but we have only to trust in Jesus and His blood will cleanse us.

'There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.'

XXXIII.—JOSIAH AND THE FINDING OF THE LOST LAW OF GOD

2 Kings xxii., xxiii. 1-25

Compare also 2 Chron. xxxiv., xxxv.

Introduction.—What was our last lesson about? A period of 250 years had elapsed from the time when Naaman was cured of his leprosy by Elisha, to the time of Josiah, king of Judah. You remember the two kings with whom Naaman and Elisha had to do—the kings of Syria and of Israel. There was now no longer a king of Syria nor a king of Israel. The Assyrians had swallowed them both up (2 Kings xvi. 9; xvii. 6). They had invaded the kingdom of Judah as well (2 Kings xviii. 13 ff.), but God had saved Jerusalem from Sennacherib, their king (2 Kings xix. 32 ff.), and the throne of Judah was still standing. It was not to stand long, however. You have seen a candle just burning done and giving a last flicker ere it goes out altogether. The piety of Josiah, and the peace and prosperity of the kingdom of Judah during his reign, were the last flicker before its candle went out in darkness.

I. **The Boy King** (xxii. 1, 2).—What was Josiah's age when he began to reign? This was very young. But young as he was, Josiah was so good that it is said of him, 'He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left' (v. 2). This was more wonderful because his father Amon was so wicked that the people had put him to death (2 Kings xxi. 22 ff.) Perhaps Jedidah, his mother, was good, and taught Josiah to fear God. We know, at any rate, that God's grace made him good. [Compare Edward VI, son of the cruel Henry VIII, loving and fearing God from his youth, and early wearing a crown.] God's grace can still make boys and girls good though they have bad homes, and it can keep them true to Him. At eight Josiah began to reign, and at sixteen he became earnest about God and His service (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3). The example of Josiah tells us that the early years of life are the best for coming to Christ and loving Him. What does God say of this (Prov. viii. 17)? There is a beautiful children's prayer in Ps. xc. 14. You might repeat it and learn it.

II. **The Royal Reformer.**—Josiah feared God from his boyhood, and at twenty he was old enough to give commands to the people. Let us see how he set about his work as king.

1. *He put away the idols* (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3-7).—The people of Judah had given themselves up to idolatry. The streets of Jerusalem were full of idols and altars and groves. The gods of the nations round about were worshipped side by side with Jehovah, the God of Israel, and there were idolatrous priests who had to do with the high places throughout the land. Josiah was grieved to think how far the people had departed from God—worshipping graven images, and taking part in the cruel rites of heathen gods. So he ordered the idols to be pulled down and their priests to be put to death. He broke the images in pieces, and strewed their dust upon the

graves of those who were put to death, thereby making it unclean, and not to be touched again. And not only throughout the kingdom of Judah did he do this. He did it through all the land of Israel, as far as Naphtali. There was now no king in Israel, and the people were people who feared the Lord and served their own gods (2 Kings xvii. 33). Perhaps Josiah wished to bring back the days of David, when there was but one kingdom and one king. We see in all this his zeal for God and righteousness, and his hatred of all that was contrary to God's true worship. Josiah is an example to us of earnestness in our religion.

2. *He set about repairing the temple* (2 Kings xxii. 3-7; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 8-13).—When the people were so given over to idols, it is not to be wondered that the temple had fallen into decay. Besides, it had been stripped of its treasures again and again. Joash (2 Kings xii. 18) and Ahaz (2 Kings xvi. 8) and Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 15) had all taken of the gold and silver vessels that were in it to buy off invading kings. How sad that the temple, the chosen dwelling-place of God, should thus be robbed and fall into ruin! Josiah could not bear to think of it, and money was collected to repair the house of the Lord. [It is only seemly that our churches, which are set apart for God's worship, should be kept in repair and be worthy of Him.] This shows us again the zeal of Josiah for God's worship. He wished not merely to destroy the idol worship, but to establish the worship of God. So Hilkiah, the high priest, got the money that was collected, and paid it to the workmen who were repairing the temple.

III. **The finding of the wonderful Book** (xxii. 8-20).—While Hilkiah was engaged in repairing the temple a wonderful book came to light. It was a book full of instructions as to the proper worship of God. It contained also terrible threatenings and curses if the worship of God was not duly observed. What was this book? It was 'the book of the law of the Lord by the hand of Moses' (2 Chron. xxxiv. 14). It had fallen into sad neglect, and so it seemed new to them. This was a priceless treasure! The temple was the casket only, this the gem which it enshrined. The temple has for ages been in ruins; the wonderful book is in our hands to this day. Hilkiah gave it to Shaphan to show it to the king. And when the king read it, and heard some of the threatenings and curses pronounced against those who depart from God (Deut. xxviii. 15 ff.; Lev. xxvi. 14 ff.), he was in great distress. He thought, if this was God's word, how he and his people had sinned! And how did he show his penitence and sorrow (2 Kings xxii. 11)? Besides this, what did he do to get fuller knowledge of God's will? He sent to Huldah, the prophetess. What was Huldah's message to Josiah? Notice God's mercy towards Josiah in this message (2 Kings xxii. 15 ff.) How ready He is to show mercy! Judgment is His strange work (Isa. xxviii. 21).

IV. **The Reformation which followed** (xxiii. 1-35).—Josiah had heard from Huldah words of mercy for himself, and words of doom for the nation. It was a dark prospect. Imagine a house where the fire is smouldering. The people in the house don't know, and are too busy enjoying themselves to care. An alarm is raised and a few come out of it, but the most part remain where they are and are burned in the flames. God's anger was kindled against Judah for their idolatries; the alarm is raised by the wonderful

book; Josiah and a few faithful ones are taken away from the scene; but ere long the fire of God's anger consumes the nation. Though Josiah knew that doom was spoken against the people, he made more earnest efforts than ever to cleanse the land from idols, and to observe God's law. Consider what was done.

1. *The book was read to the people.*—The king felt the words of the law to be earnest and powerful, and he thought it would do the people good to hear them. The law of God was as strange to the people then as the Bible was to our fathers before the Reformation. The Bible was then in a strange tongue which people could not understand. Thanks to William Tyndale and others we have it now in our own tongue. Let us not neglect it, lest it become a strange book again.

2. *The people entered into a covenant to keep the Law.*—Josiah led the people in doing this. [Think of the people signing the Covenant in Greyfriars Churchyard, Edinburgh, in 1638.] It is to be feared that the people were not so much in earnest as the king. They did not enter into the covenant with their whole heart, and so they did not keep it long.

3. *Idolatry was put down throughout the land.*—There were vessels in the temple that had been used for the service of Baal. They were burnt, and their ashes carried to Bethel. A great reformation was carried through, and even the high places at Bethel where Jeroboam set up his golden calf were defiled. What prophecy was fulfilled by this (2 Kings xxiii. 15-20; 1 Kings xiii. 1-32)?

4. *The Passover was kept in proper form.*—Still Josiah was not content with putting away what was wrong; he must restore what is right. For full account of this Passover with the sacrifices and the feasting, see 2 Chron. xxxv. 1-19. The neglect of the Passover showed how the nation had forgotten God's goodness in the past, and how little they cared for the great Deliverer who was to come.

While still in his prime Josiah died, slain in battle at the age of thirty-nine. The kings who came after him were wicked, and soon the kingdom of Judah ceased to be.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

What a force there is in true religion when once a young life has come under its power! Josiah is a pattern to the youngest in fearing God and in diligently pursuing His service. And true religion is kept alive in a heart and in a nation by the Word of God. It was because it gave the Word of God its right place that the Reformation three or four hundred years ago has been such a blessing to our land and to other lands. Let us love the Bible, which has been called 'the secret of Britain's greatness.' And let us, like Josiah, diligently and reverently read the Word of God, and give willing attention to its precepts, that we may live for God all our days, and do our part in building up His kingdom.

XXXIV.—THE HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION OF CHRIST FORETOLD

Isa. liii. (compare Luke xxiv. 25-27)

Introduction.—In previous lessons we have heard of prophets—Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Do you remember what was said about the office of the prophet (Lesson XXI.)? It was the prophet's office to speak on behalf of God to men. He declared God's mind and will to the people as God made it known to him by vision, or dream, or word,—sometimes judgment and rebuke and doom; sometimes mercy and comfort and hope. And often in declaring God's will the prophet's words reached beyond the present to the future. Give illustrations of this in the case of the prophets already named (1 Sam. iii. 11; 1 Kings xvii. 1; 2 Kings xiii. 19).

When we turn, however, to the prophecies of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and the others down to Malachi, we find in them, and also in the Psalms, one subject in particular upon which they delight to dwell. It is the coming of a Great Deliverer, who is to found a Universal Kingdom and to bring in a religion, not of outward ceremonies, but of the heart and of the spirit. The hope of a Deliverer, the Messiah—One anointed and set apart by God for the work of redemption—first promised in Genesis (iii. 15), grows larger and fuller as time rolls on. This hope runs through the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi, sometimes lost sight of for a time, but ever showing itself again clearer and fuller than before. It is like one of the rivers of Spain which for part of its course flows underground, and only at intervals, miles apart, throws up pools to the surface which the people call its eyes (the eyes of the Gaudiana),—the pools showing the progress of the river until at length it bursts forth in a broad stream making its way for the distant sea. So the hope of the Messiah flows onwards, throwing up its pools, as it were, to the surface in the times of Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and the rest, until it is fulfilled in the coming of Christ, and bursts forth in the broad rivers and streams of the Gospel.

Isaiah is so full of that hope that he has been called by pre-eminence the Gospel Prophet. And this chapter contains one of the most precise and striking predictions of the Messiah in the Old Testament. It is **Messiah as a Sufferer** whom he here sees with prophetic vision. We can only glance at the features of this suffering Person as Isaiah foresaw Him through the dim distance of hundreds of years.

I. **Messiah despised and rejected** (vv. 1-3).—The prophet has been calling attention to the Servant of God as exalted and lofty (read Isa. lii. 13-15). But the exaltation is in proportion to a previous humiliation, which he now sees and describes. As he proceeds to utter his oracle the prophet feels that few will care for what he has to tell. He has to tell what will not agree with the expectation of most. For what is it that he sees as he looks with divinely enlightened eyes into the future? A striking and majestic Form round whom multitudes gather with shouts of praise? Far from that! He sees a sickly plant in the wilderness, a sprout struggling up from the dry sand of the desert; One altogether without

beauty or majesty, with nothing about Him to attract the crowd; nay, more, One held in contempt, and scarcely counted a man; One suffering much both in body and in mind; One from whom people turn away as from a loathsome and disgusting sight.

How true this was of Jesus when we regard Him as the Suffering Saviour! Born in a stable, brought up in despised Nazareth, poor and humble in his condition of life, and, though loved warmly by His disciples, despised and abhorred by the Pharisees and other religious people of His day. 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!' was their cry; 'not this man but Barabbas.' And though men now would not cry 'Away with Him!' there are still many who see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. How sad! Sadder still, if we are of them! Read Paraphrase xxvi. 1-4.

II. **Messiah suffering in the Room of Sinners** (vv. 4-9).—As the prophet gazes upon this suffering Figure revealed to him by God, he learns **what He is doing** and **why He suffers.** He is **taking the place of the sinful and the guilty;** He suffers because **the load of the world's sins is laid upon Him.**

The prophet has often seen the innocent lamb taken for an offering, and its blood shed beside the altar. He has in his mind the great Day of Atonement which came round every year, when all Israel assembled to confess before God all their sins. On that day two goats were taken. One of them was killed and its blood carried by the high priest into the Most Holy Place (Lesson XVII.), to sprinkle the mercy-seat and cover the people's sins from God's holy sight. The other goat was then brought forward and the high priest laid his hands upon it, confessing over it the people's sins, as if to lay them upon the goat. The goat was then sent away bearing the sins of the people into the wilderness, and away among the barren hills the people on the temple platform could perhaps see the man who led it forth hurling the goat over a cliff so that it would return no more. All these things are in the prophet's thoughts as he describes the suffering Messiah. And so he says, 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities . . . He hath poured out His soul unto death.'

It is **great suffering and shame** which are here described. Stricken of God as if smitten with the awful plague of leprosy; His body wounded, and bruised, and covered with stripes; scornfully treated, getting only the mockery of justice, and after death, buried with wicked men, though a rich man found Him a grave.

Has the world ever known any one suffering like this? Yes. One, and only One. **What is said of this sufferer is strikingly fulfilled in the sufferings and death of Jesus.** When we read of stripes, we remember the scourging of Jesus; when we read of Him bruised, we think of the nails; when we read of One stricken of God, and One from whom God turns His face away, we think of Jesus crying, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' When we read of One buried with the wicked, we think of the two thieves; and when we read of the grave which the rich found for Him, we think of Joseph's rock-hewn tomb.

It is for the sins of men that the Messiah described in the prophecy suffers. 'He bore our griefs.' 'He bare the sins of many.' 'By His

stripes we are healed.' This is the burden of the prophecy, and no fewer than twelve expressions distinctly set it forth. Search out these expressions.

And as the Messiah here spoken of suffered in the room of the guilty, **Jesus suffered in the room of sinners.** He was the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world (John i. 29). He bore our sins in His own body (1 Pet. ii. 24). He was made sin for us (2 Cor. v. 21). He loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. ii. 20). Read Paraphrase xxvi. 5-11.

When we read this prophecy we find Jesus in every line of it! What a joy it is to know that He has borne our sins away on the cross of shame! Is this joy ours?

'O why was He there as the bearer of sin
If on Jesus thy guilt was not laid?
Or why from His side flowed the sin-cleansing blood
If His dying thy debt has not paid?'

III. **Messiah rewarded and glorified** (vv. 10-12).—The death of the sufferer whom the prophet saw, though brought about by men, is according to the purpose of God. God has a great end to serve, and He will not leave it half fulfilled. The sufferer shall be rewarded by seeing multitudes cleansed and saved from sin through the sin-offering He offered—His own soul. This was God's purpose—to save men through His sufferings and death, and the purpose is made good by men being forgiven and accepted through His sacrifice. It is thus that He becomes a Conqueror, to be named with the mighty and the strong.

Has there ever been One on earth who through suffering and death has risen to glory and honour, and won the hearts of men for His own? Yes. Jesus Christ. He died on the cross, was buried in Joseph's tomb, and rose again on the third day. He ascended to heaven, and He ever lives making intercession for us. By His death He won the right to bestow pardon of sin and life eternal upon all that come to Him. And multitudes have come to Him. Napoleon once said, 'I founded a great empire. Upon what did it depend? Upon force. **Jesus Christ founded a great empire upon love,** and to this hour millions would die for Him.' He loved sinners even unto death. Read Paraphrase xxvi. 12-16.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

How precious the death of Jesus is! As it filled the minds of the prophets before He came, it will also fill the hearts of the redeemed throughout eternity (Rev. v. 5, 11, 12). Let us prize it as the ground of our forgiveness and peace with God.

Jesus through suffering was raised to honour (Phil. ii. 6-11). So for us it is true also **'No cross, no crown.' If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him** (2 Tim. ii. 12).

TO THE TEACHER

This is a difficult lesson to teach to young children. They shrink from a subject so dark and painful as the humiliation of the Messiah foreshadowed by the prophet. They like to think of Jesus as beautiful and lovely, both in character and in person. Still, it is well that they learn of Him as the Suffering Saviour, and that they should be taught how the Son of God, the adored of angels, the altogether lovely, stooped to shame and pain and rejection and death to save sinners, and to win His Father's peace, even for little children.

XXXV.—GOD'S GRACIOUS PROVISION FOR FAMISHING SOULS

Isa. lv. (compare John vi. 51, 55; vii. 37)

Introduction.—In last lesson we heard about the Universal Kingdom foretold by the prophets, and especially about its King. Who is He? Through what did He reach His throne? What did He win for us by His sufferings and death? What has He now to bestow, exalted as He is at God's right hand? He has abundant supplies of grace, from which to meet all the needs of weary, perishing men. Sometimes a man who begins life poor becomes, through hard work, very rich; he can then do great good with his money,—give a public park, found a free library, bring in a water supply to a village, help many poor people, send the Gospel to the heathen, and many such things. Though Jesus for our sakes was poor on earth, He has now all power given to Him in heaven and in earth, and all spiritual blessings are in His hand for the eternal salvation of men. He has pardon to bestow upon the guilty; He has grace to give to the tried and tempted; He has comfort to send to the sad; and, best of all, the Holy Spirit to impart to all who will make room in their hearts for Him. It was to all this that the prophet looked forward as He dwelt upon the blessings of Messiah's kingdom. He thought of

I. **A Hungry and Thirsty World.**—How terrible it is to be in the desert, or on the sea, or amid the ice, with nothing to eat and nothing to drink! Stories there are of death thus staring the traveller in the face. [One of the most thrilling stories of recent times is that of the Greeley expedition to the North Pole, when all but a few died of hunger, and even they had eaten their last bite, and had lain down to die, as the men of the relieving ship came up to them.] We hear from time to time of sore famines in India and China and other lands, where children cry for bread and there is none to give them, and old and young perish of hunger. You have heard of the drought and the famine in the time of Elijah, and you may read of the awful famine in Samaria in the days of Elisha (2 Kings vi. 24 ff.) But when you hear of famine carrying off thousands in India and China, do you not think of the worse famine—the want of the knowledge of God—of which millions of the human family are perishing?

For remember the soul of man hungers and thirsts for God just as the body for food and drink. If you open a dark cellar where a plant has been put to grow, you will find that it has been stretching itself towards the light which comes in through the chinks in the door. And the soul of man turns to God as its food as the plant turns to the light for its food. This was what St. Paul meant when he spoke of God to the men of Athens (Acts xvii. 22 ff.) This was what David meant when he said, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God' (Ps. xlii. 2), and Job when he said, 'I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food' (Job xxiii. 12). The soul needs food to nourish it, and it can find it only in the knowledge and love and service of God.

It is sad to be hungry and to have nothing to eat. It is sadder to be

anxious to know about God, like the heathen, and to have no clear or certain knowledge of Him. It is saddest of all to be living in a Christian land, having the knowledge of God and yet shutting the heart against it.

II. **Bread which satisfieth not.**—If a company of travellers had used up all their supplies and were dying of hunger, what good would it do them to find nuggets of gold or heaps of precious stones? These could never satisfy their hunger. Yet many seek to satisfy the longing of their hearts for God with as unsatisfying things. They spend money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not (v. 2).

False gods cannot satisfy.—They could never take the place of the living and true God. Yet many in heathen lands make images and worship them, or perhaps they regard the sun and the moon or the hills and streams as gods. But they find no true rest or help in such worship (Ps. cxv. 2-8). The heathen need something better to satisfy the craving of their souls for God.

Riches and pleasure cannot satisfy.—Many people give themselves up to enjoyment and try to forget about God altogether. They have nice houses and fine clothes and abundance to eat and drink, and they trouble themselves about nothing beyond the life that now is. The rich fool of whom Jesus speaks shows how unsatisfying that is (Luke xii. 15 ff.)

Knowledge cannot satisfy.—Knowledge is of great value for ordinary life. 'Knowledge is power,' we say. It is good to read books, to be clever at lessons, to learn grammar and geography and history, to know two or three languages, and so forth. This helps to furnish the mind, and to fit us for our place in life. But the soul craves for love; and, even where the mind is stored with knowledge, the heart longs for One whom it may trust and know and love (1 Cor. xiii. 2).

III. **The Bread and the Water of Life.**—God has graciously met **the hunger and thirst** of our souls **in Jesus Christ, His Son.**

What the prophet has foretold of waters for the thirsty was fulfilled in Jesus. He said, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink' (John vii. 37); 'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (John iv. 14). How precious this living water to souls perishing of thirst! [Illustrate by Hagar in the wilderness with Ishmael, and God opening her eyes to see a well; or by this: Sir Richard Burton, when travelling in Africa, found his supply of water gone. He and his party travelled on in search of wells, but none could be found. They were about to give up all for lost, when a sand grouse flew across before them, and alighted a little way off. Burton knew from the habits of the bird that a well was near. They soon found it, and how glad they were, for it was the saving of their lives.]

And what the prophet foretold of bread for the hungry was fulfilled in Jesus too. Jesus said, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' You have seen the Communion dispensed in church. You have seen the tables robed in white, the Communion bread partaken of by the worshippers, and the Communion cups passed along from hand to hand. That is a picture of Jesus as the bread and the water of life. It recalls His life as

man upon earth—**His Incarnation**—for though He was God He became man for us; and it recalls His death upon the cross in our room and stead—**His Atonement**—bearing the load of our sins, as we saw in last lesson. The heart then dwells with gratitude and trust upon the life and death and work of Jesus, and may be said to feed upon Him. And so Jesus says, 'My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.'

Whom are they for?—They are for the hungry and thirsty, without respect of persons; for high and low, rich and poor, young and old, for all who feel their need of God's mercy and grace and love. All have sinned and all need mercy. All are spiritually destitute, and all need supplies of grace. But God's offer is equal to the universal need, and suited to our necessity: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money' (Isa. lv. 1); 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me' (John vii. 37). 'And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. xxii. 17). None are shut out, and there is abundance for all.

What is to pay for them?—They are 'without money and without price' (Isa. lv. 1). No money could purchase them; no working could earn them. The sovereign in this country is the fountain of honour; titles cannot be bought with money; they are the free gift of the sovereign to those whom she delights to honour. Gospel blessings, the Holy Spirit, pardon of sin, sanctifying grace, fitness for heaven, and heaven itself are priceless; they are the free gift of the King of kings. 'The **gift of God** . . . **living water**' (John iv. 10). 'The **gift of God** is **eternal life**, through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. vi. 23).

How are they to be made ours?—The invitation is: 'Come ye, buy, and eat. . . . Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live.' Is there then something to be done and paid before these blessings become ours? No! It is only meant that people must be in earnest about them, and must be at the trouble to take them when they are offered. Jesus said, 'I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst' (John vi. 35). Walking along a dusty road in summer you feel thirsty. There is a wayside well; you go to it, stoop down, and drink the sparkling water. And so all that we have to do is to make up our minds and take with thankfulness these Gospel blessings which are offered to us freely. Shall we not take them the more readily if we are athirst for them and feel our need of them? [The heart of a boy or a girl is set upon a watch. A friend knows it, and says, 'Here is a watch for you; I know you are anxious to have it.' Would it not be foolish and ungrateful to refuse it?] How sad that so many refuse to make Gospel blessings their own, though they are offered for the taking!

Will they satisfy and endure?—They are ours by 'an everlasting covenant'; they are 'the sure mercies of David,' which are established so that they cannot fail. 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled' (Matt. v. 6). 'That's me,' said a girl who on her deathbed had tasted the sweetness of saving grace, and thirsted for more. She was satisfied when an entrance was ministered to her abundantly into the bliss of heaven. This is a hunger and thirst which leads on to the happiest life here and is satisfied with eternal life hereafter (Ps. xvii. 15; 1 John iii. 2).

XXXVI.—DANIEL TELLS NEBUCHADNEZZAR HIS DREAM, AND INTERPRETS IT

Daniel ii.

Introduction.—In previous lessons we have heard about the Universal Kingdom which Messiah was to set up through suffering and death, and the blessings He was to bestow, as we learned in last lesson, upon hungry and thirsty souls, without money and without price. The hope of a Universal Kingdom, ruled by their Messiah, was held out by the prophets to cheer the people in the darkest times. And they were dark times on which the chosen people had now fallen. The kingdom of Israel had long ceased to be (Lesson XXXIII.) The kingdom of Judah had been swallowed up by the great Babylonian Empire; Jerusalem had been taken after a long siege, and its walls and temple and royal palace destroyed; the last king, Zedekiah, a son of good King Josiah, had had his eyes put out and died in prison at Babylon.

Some years before this last catastrophe (2 Kings xxiv.; Daniel i. 1-6) Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had taken away captive to the East many young men belonging to the best Jewish families. Among these were **Daniel,** and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, whom we shall know better by their Chaldean names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel was of the royal blood of Judah, and, though young when carried off to Babylon, he feared God, prayed to Him continually, and had regard to His law. In personal character and in the favour which he gained on all sides he reminds us of Joseph in Egypt; in learning and wisdom (Daniel i. 17 ff.) he reminds us of Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts vii. 22). It was while he was still a youth at the court of the king of Babylon that he obtained from God the interpretation of **Nebuchadnezzar's dream,** and got that glimpse which our lesson contains of the kingdom which shall stand for ever (v. 44).

Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest king of his age. He was a great conqueror in war, and he was equally great in the arts of peace. The Hanging Gardens which he built at Babylon for his queen were among the seven wonders of the ancient world. Inscriptions have been brought to light showing the greatness of his public works, and we learn from the Scriptures the greatness of his conquests. If any one had wished to point to the greatest king in those times Nebuchadnezzar was he. [Compare Queen Victoria and the Emperor of Germany at the present time.] He stands out, along with Pharaoh and Sennacherib, as one who set himself up against the kingdom of God. They thought their power and glory would endure for ever. But they made a great mistake. 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass' (1 Pet. i. 24). 'Power belongeth unto God' (Ps. lxii. 11). This was something which Nebuchadnezzar needed to learn, and he got his first lesson from the dream which God sent him. We see here

I. **The Dream forgotten** (vv. 1-13).—Sometimes you have a dream which you think wonderful or terrible at the moment. But when you are fairly awake it has all gone, and you cannot remember it. Still it does not

distress you; it is of no moment. It was different of old. Dreams were supposed among the heathen to furnish indications of the will of their gods. A dream was, therefore, often of great consequence to a king who wished, as he thought, to follow the directions of the gods. Nebuchadnezzar was in great distress because he had forgotten his dream. His spirit was troubled and he could not sleep. There were at his court men who professed to be skilled in reading dreams, and telling from the appearance of the stars what they thought was to come. What were they called (v. 2)? What did Nebuchadnezzar demand from them? Were they able to comply? Who did they say was able to do this (v. 11)? What did Nebuchadnezzar decree (vv. 12, 13)? This seems very cruel; but great kings in the East often did such things, and Nebuchadnezzar was only acting like most kings with such power in the circumstances.

II. **The Dream revealed** (vv. 14-35).—Among those who were to be slain, by Nebuchadnezzar's decree, were Daniel and his three friends. Were they ordinary magicians and astrologers (Daniel i. 17-20)? What did Daniel think of the king's decree? To whom did he speak on the subject? What did Daniel ask from the king? How did Daniel use the time that was left? Daniel and his companions believed in the power of prayer. They knew Who had said, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me' (Ps. l. 15). When St. Peter was imprisoned by Herod long after this, prayer was made without ceasing unto God for him, and he was delivered (Acts xii. 5, 12, 16). [When William Wilberforce, who did so much to win freedom for the slaves in British possessions, was speaking in Parliament at a critical point on the subject, a little band of friends were praying about it all the time, and that night the cause gained a majority in the House of Commons.] Just picture this little prayer-meeting in the great city of Babylon upon which the lives of so many depended. Was the prayer answered? Yes; God revealed the dream to Daniel in a vision of the night, and Daniel was glad. And the first thing he did was, not to rush off and tell what had happened, but to thank God for making known the king's matter. [Read his prayer of thanksgiving (vv. 20-23), and repeat v. 22.]

Then Daniel went to Arioch, who had been ordered to execute the king's decree, and Arioch brought him to the king. Notice the change upon the name of Daniel ('*God is my judge*'), and the new name given him by the king after the name of his god; given that he might forget his country and the God of Israel. But as Daniel stands humbly and trustfully before Nebuchadnezzar he ascribes all the wisdom he possesses, and his power to reveal the dream, to his fathers' God—the God of Israel. He tells the king that only the true God could read the heart, and only He could tell the future. Then he made known to Nebuchadnezzar his dream. He told Nebuchadnezzar that, as he had been thinking of the future, he had seen a splendid image in the form of a man—head, gold; breast and arms, silver; belly and thighs, brass; legs, iron; and feet, partly iron and partly clay: then a stone cut without hands with one stroke shattering the image to pieces, and itself growing into a mountain and filling the earth. What a wonderful dream! What could it mean?

III. **The Dream interpreted** (vv. 36-49).—You can imagine how eager

Nebuchadnezzar is to know the meaning of his dream. He will listen with more confidence now to the young prophet because he has recalled it for him.

What are the different parts of the image?—They are various kingdoms of the earth, which rose and had power and decayed and passed away, the one after the other. (1) The head of gold was Babylon, great and noble and powerful; (2) the breast and arms of silver were the kingdom of the Medes and Persians which took the place of Babylon; (3) the belly and thighs of brass were Greece, which, under Alexander the Great, conquered the Persians; (4) the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay were the great Roman Empire, which succeeded them all, and seemed likely to last for ever. It is part of the vision that each gives way to the next, till all have passed. However great, they are only for a time; and this will be the case with all kingdoms unless they become the kingdoms of God and His Christ.

What is the image as a whole?—It represents the world as it sets itself up against God, under all its forms and under different rulers. There are but two kingdoms upon earth—that which is against God, and that which is for Him. All that is against Him changes and passes; that which is for Him abides for ever. God's kingdom, now in its most spiritual form set up by Christ, is

The stone cut without hands.—There was no noise heard nor hands seen at work when the stone was cut out of the mountain. And so lowly and unnoticed by the world was the beginning of the kingdom of Christ. Jesus called it a mustard seed, it was so small at its beginning; but He said it was to be a great tree filling the earth, and letting the birds of the air lodge in its branches. And the stone cut without hands of which Daniel spake grew into a mountain and filled the earth. Has Christ's kingdom done this? It has grown marvellously, taking up into itself all that was good and pure and true in the world. It is already in almost every land. You cannot help seeing it. We ourselves belong to it. Our churches, the Sabbath day, Christian men and women, are all tokens of it, and part of it. We pray for it every time we say, 'Thy kingdom come.' Will it pass away? Never! It shall stand for ever. Will it give place to any other kingdom? No. 'His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him' (Daniel vii. 27). A voice will be heard at length saying, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. xvi. 15).

SPIRITUAL LESSON

See how sure is the Word of God. All this has come to pass, and we see the fulfilment side by side with the prophecy. God did indeed speak by His prophets, for none but He could reveal to them the future and bring it all to pass.

How foolish it is to belong to the kingdom of this world. People always like to be on the winning side. **The side of righteousness, goodness, Christ, God, is the winning side;** and we should range ourselves on it, and live and work and pray for its final triumph.

XXXVII.—SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO IN THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE

Daniel iii.

Introduction.—Since the time referred to in last lesson about twenty years have passed. Daniel's reading of Nebuchadnezzar's dream had been followed by important consequences. (1) The impression was left upon the mind of Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel's God—the God of Israel—was indeed the living and true God. 'Of a truth,' he said, 'your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings' (Daniel ii. 47). This impression did not last, as we shall see. (2) Daniel, and, through him, his companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were raised to positions of great prominence and influence in Babylon (Daniel ii. 48, 49). It shows a fine spirit in Daniel that he did not forget his friends when raised to honour, but got them raised to dignity like himself; and the elevation of these four youths must have given heart to the Jewish exiles throughout the whole empire.

Meanwhile Nebuchadnezzar was carried away by the pride of almost boundless power. His heart was filled with the thought of his grandeur and might till he thought himself little less than God. [Illustrate by Alexander the Great calling himself the son of Jupiter; Herod allowing the people to shout, 'It is the voice of a god, and not of a man' (Acts xii. 22); or by this: Louis XIV of France placed his portrait in the palace at Versailles with the words written below, 'The King, he is absolute monarch.' Yet it was right under that portrait that the Emperor William I. of Germany sat in 1870-71 when the Germans had overrun France and taken Paris.] It is still the conflict between the two kingdoms of which we spoke in last lesson which is before us to-day—the warfare between the world and God. To-day's lesson shows that, mighty and proud and cruel as Nebuchadnezzar was on the throne of Babylon, he was powerless to hurt God's servants who were in His keeping, and who were true to Him. So true it is, 'Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world' (1 John iv. 4). Consider then

I. **The Golden Image** (vv. 1-3).—So great was the pride of Nebuchadnezzar's heart that he resolved to set up an image or embodiment of his power, for all within his dominions to worship. He bethought himself of the image he had seen in his dream years before (Daniel ii. 31 ff.), but not content that its head only should be of gold, he made his image all of gold—to the eye at least. It was a huge figure. [Illustrate by the figures of the great Egyptian statues, of which there are pictures to be seen, cut out of the solid rock or fashioned of single blocks.] Ninety feet high and nine feet broad, it could be seen far and near as it stood upon the great plain of Dura.

II. **The Royal Proclamation** (vv. 4-7).—The image was dedicated with great pomp. The princes and great men of the empire had been assembled, and with them doubtless many of lower degree. Who is that standing out from the crowd, and shouting as loud as he can? It is a herald proclaiming the king's wishes to the assembled people. The king's command is, that at the blast of the musical instruments—the Babylonians were very

fond of music—all the people, of whatever country or language, should fall down and worship the image, on pain of being cast into a fiery furnace. You can picture them all looking towards the image, waiting till the burst of music should bid them fall on their faces to the ground before it. [Illustrate by the striking up of the band at the starting of a procession, or the opening of an exhibition.] At length the signal is given, and the great multitude sways forward and falls flat as one man.

III. **The Refusal of the Jews** (vv. 8-18).—Have all fallen down? Surely none will hold back when the multitude with one accord bow down! Surely none will disobey this mighty king, especially when death is the penalty! There are three men, at least, who dare to defy the authority of Nebuchadnezzar—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. What prompts them thus to face the fiery furnace? They are under the command of a greater King than Nebuchadnezzar; they owe worship to One and to One alone. As Jews they have been taught from childhood to repeat, 'The Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. vi. 4), and they could not without sin give the worship and the glory to any other which is due to Him alone. They might have got off by appearing to worship, but they would not give even the appearance of compliance, because they were out and out for God. Of course they were observed and brought before the king. The king gave them another chance, bidding them think of the fiery furnace, and asking, 'Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?' They had counted the cost; they trusted in God that He would deliver them; and if they should die, it was better to die than to dishonour God. [Illustrate by stories of the martyrs—Polycarp, John Huss, the English martyrs, the Scottish Covenanters; also by examples of young people refusing to tell a lie, or to join in a wrong custom, even though they had to suffer for it.]

IV. **The Fiery Furnace** (vv. 19-23).—Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the God of Daniel, the God of Israel. And now, without mercy, and in great anger, he has the three, men of position and influence and character though they were, bound as they stood, and cast with their clothes on into the fiery furnace, heated to its utmost. So hot was the fire that it burned up the men who took them to cast them in. It was a cruel scene, and it could not but strike horror into all the onlookers. [Illustrate by the young Uganda martyrs whose arms were cut off before they were cast into the fire, and who in the flames sang—

'Daily, daily, sing the praises
Of the city God hath made.']

V. **The Miraculous Deliverance** (vv. 24-30).—You would expect them to be consumed to ashes in a moment. Was this the case? No! What was the astonishment of Nebuchadnezzar to see the men who had been cast **bound** into the fire now walking **loose**, and suffering no hurt amid the flames! Strangest of all, there was a fourth man with them in form 'like a son of the gods' (v. 25, Revised Version)—the angel of God (v. 28). The pride of the king has got a fall. There are limits to his power. There is a kingdom far grander than his, whose King has come to the help of His faithful servants. He humbly addresses them now as servants of the Most High God, and bids them come forth. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

come forth of the midst of the fire—not a hair of their heads singed, and not even the smell of the fire upon their clothes. It was a wonder that struck Nebuchadnezzar, and his great men, with fear of the God of Israel. And now the proud king who thought so lightly of the God of the Hebrews causes a decree to be sent throughout his whole empire, bidding all his subjects respect and honour the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and he advanced the three in the province of Babylon. Does not this show how, by holding to what is right even when a multitude chooses what is wrong—even in the face of threats and of sufferings, God's servants—ay, the youngest of them—may make His name to be honoured by the careless and the wicked, and may even obtain honour themselves?

SPIRITUAL LESSON

God's people have long been wont to think of the companion who appeared with the three Hebrews in the furnace as the Son of God, in human form before the time. When the fulness of the time came, God's Son did share temptation and trial and suffering with His brethren of mankind. And it is delightful to think that in all their trials and sufferings for His sake He is with His brethren still. Especially, in all bearing of reproach and in all standing up for what is right, we may expect Christ to be with us, and to make us strong. His word has often been fulfilled, as a boy or a girl has been true to Him, '**Whosoever will lose his life for My sake, shall find it**' (Matt. x. 39).

XXXVIII.—DANIEL INTERPRETS THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Daniel v.

Introduction.—The scene of our lesson to-day is still in Babylon. The great Nebuchadnezzar, 'the head of gold,' who set up the golden image for all men to worship, has, after a long and glorious reign, passed away. With him faded the glory of the Babylonian empire, and we are to-day to see the 'head of gold' giving place to 'the breast and arms of silver.' [Explain this (Daniel ii. 36 ff.)] A new king—Belshazzar—is now on the throne of Babylon. It is fairly certain that Belshazzar was king of Babylon along with his father—called Nabonidus—and that his mother was a daughter of the great king Nebuchadnezzar. He was thus the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and if Nebuchadnezzar is called his father (v. 2), that is a frequent way of speaking in Scripture. Jonathan is called Mephibosheth's father (2 Sam. ix. 7), though he was really his grandfather; David is called the father of Asa and Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, though he was really no more than their royal ancestor (1 Kings xv. 11; 2 Kings xvi. 2; xviii. 3).

I. **Belshazzar's Feast** (vv. 1-4).—Before we look into the palace of Belshazzar resounding with laughter and song and revelry, let us view the situation at the time. For a while past, Babylon has been in danger from a new king who has arisen in the north and east—Cyrus. Cyrus had been pointed out by the prophet as the deliverer of God's people and the restorer of their ancient glory (Isa. xliv. 28). He was a great and noble prince, and those of the Jews who remembered and loved their own land had hope of him, that he would restore them to it. 'He shall let go my captives,' God had said by the prophet (Isa. xlv. 13). This hope was not misplaced, as we shall see (Lesson XL.) Cyrus, himself a Persian, had united the Medes and Persians ('the breast and arms of silver,' Daniel ii. 36 ff.) under his rule, and, having shown himself a great conqueror, he had come against Babylon and laid siege to it. Babylon had strong defences and great stores of provisions; the river Euphrates flowed through the city between strong walls with iron gates; the city walls were eighty feet thick and two hundred feet high. Even Cyrus thought it barely possible that he could succeed in taking it, and Belshazzar felt so safe within the lofty walls that he did as he liked.

The whole city is enjoying itself. The annual festival of his god has come round, and Belshazzar is giving a great feast. Look into the palace. Its walls are of plastered brick and painted over with scenes from war and the chase. Within it nobles, princes, princesses, and the women of the court are gathered—a gay and splendid company. No luxury is wanting that Babylon can furnish. The king is drinking freely before his guests, and they are not slow to follow his example. As they drink they become excited with wine, and the king in his drunken folly is ready for any wickedness. He proposes that they should now get the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had brought from Jerusalem (Jer. lii. 19), and drink out of them. It was an impious thing to do. It was to pour

contempt upon Jehovah, the God of Israel; for while Belshazzar and the princes and the women in their drunken revel drank out of cups that had been given to the holy service of the temple of God at Jerusalem, they praised their own gods of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, and wood, and stone. It was to defy and insult the living God; it was as if God, who had suffered these vessels and cups to be taken away, had been proved powerless to help His people. Was this the case? No! God had suffered the vessels to be taken, and allowed the Chaldeans to do it, to punish His rebellious people; but if they thought that God was no longer the Almighty they were grievously mistaken, and they would soon learn their folly!

II. **The Mysterious Handwriting** (vv. 5-12).—Just as this impious revelry is at its height, Belshazzar suddenly turns pale. His limbs shake, and his mind fills with anxious thoughts. His eyes are fixed upon the wall. What does he see to make him tremble? He sees a hand writing upon the wall words which he cannot make out. Strange words: **Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!** Every one is quiet now. Belshazzar calls for the wise men, as Nebuchadnezzar had done, to read the writing and tell the meaning. What does he offer? Could they do it? The queen, his mother, heard the commotion and came into the banqueting hall. Being the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, she could remember scenes like this of old. She counselled the king to send for Daniel. Daniel came and heard from the king what was wanted from him, and what was the reward he offered. The tables were completely turned. An hour before, Belshazzar was boasting over the God of Israel; now he is glad to turn for His help to the man in his kingdom who was known as His most faithful servant.

III. **Daniel's Rebuke** (vv. 13-24).—Daniel seems to have been unknown to the king. He was no longer chief of the wise men at the court of Babylon, but the same spirit was in him as when he stood before Nebuchadnezzar. He would have none of Belshazzar's rewards, but at once rebuked him for his pride and wickedness. He recalled to him God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, and reminded him how Nebuchadnezzar, the proud and boastful, had become humble. He did not shrink from telling him that it was the living God, whom he had insulted, upon whom he depended for all things. He summed up the rebuke in this: 'The God in whose hand thy heart is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified' (v. 23). It was He that had sent the hand; it was He whose words had struck fear into his breast. Again Daniel told the great world-ruler how foolish it was to contend with God. 'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!' (Isa. xlv. 9).

IV. **Daniel's Interpretation** (vv. 25-28).—Daniel now points to the wall where the mysterious writing was. Just as he had read by God's help Nebuchadnezzar's dream, so now he reads the writing to Belshazzar. Word by word he explains it: **Numbered, Weighed, Divided.** It meant that his kingdom was at an end, that he was counted unfit by God to reign, and that Babylon was already given to the Medes and Persians. What a terrible message to a king who thought himself secure within his lofty walls! We think of the rich fool of whom Jesus speaks (Luke xii. 16 ff.) He said, 'Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said, 'Thou fool,

this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' To live like that is the height of folly.

V. The City taken (vv. 29-31).—Belshazzar was as good as his word to Daniel; what did he give him? what did he make him (v. 27)? This, perhaps, means next to him and his father, who was his colleague on the throne. But Belshazzar's reign was over. That night saw the fall of Babylon. Cyrus had turned the waters of the Euphrates into another bed, and, knowing that the city was given over to revelry, he had poured his army under the water gates upon the undefended city, and made an easy capture. In the night of his impious revelry Belshazzar was slain, and the empire of Babylon came to an end. Cyrus handed the captured city to Darius, the Mede, who ruled in Babylon two years under Cyrus. Thus in a moment, and most unexpectedly, the words of Daniel were fulfilled, and God again shown to be supreme in wisdom and power.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

Although God may suffer men to enjoy themselves in sin, and blaspheme His name for a time, He sees it all, and will in the end—in an hour that they think not of—inflict awful punishment. **We may learn here the folly of a life given over to the enjoyment of sinful pleasure, for the end of it is death.** Especially will all defiance of God meet with terrible doom. The Emperor Julian is said to have pointed his dagger to heaven defying the Son of God, whom he called the Galilean; but when he was at last mortally wounded in battle, he exclaimed with his last breath, 'O Galilean, Thou hast conquered.'

TO THE TEACHER

It may be mentioned for the information of the teacher, although it may not be needful to use the fact in teaching the lesson, that for a long time there was no trustworthy information about Belshazzar outside the Book of Daniel. No other history mentions his name, and some people thought the Bible was wrong in speaking of Belshazzar as the last king of Babylon. But nearly forty years ago learned men found upon brick tablets, dug out of the ruins of ancient Babylon, distinct mention of Belshazzar, quite consistent with what we read in the Book of Daniel. We learn here what we have been taught so often of recent years, how God cares for His own Word, and brings evidence to light to confirm it at the right time.

XXXIX.—DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

Daniel vi.

Introduction.—In last lesson we heard of the death of Belshazzar after a short reign, and the end of the Babylonian Empire after eighty-seven years of power and splendour. [Recall who captured Babylon; the stratagem by which he did so; to whom he handed over the reins of power.] Darius belonged to the Medes, who, though now allied with the Persians, were a superior people. Perhaps it was to keep them content that Cyrus, himself a Persian, chose Darius to rule at Babylon. Cyrus at any rate kept in the background for a time, and Darius had full power in Babylon. Darius was not a bad ruler, for he set himself earnestly to put the new kingdom of the Medes and Persians in order. He was not a young man, being sixty-two years of age. He was none the less fitted to occupy the place of power until Cyrus should deem it wise to take the government directly into his own hands. At the court of Darius we see Daniel again an outstanding and important figure.

I. **Daniel in Power** (vv. 1-5).—Daniel was now an old man, over fourscore. It was nearly seventy years since he had been brought a captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. What a wonderful career he had had! He had risen from the place of a youthful exile at Nebuchadnezzar's court, to be next to the king in Babylon. He had done so by his **prudence and wisdom, by his stainless honour,** and **by his faithfulness to God.** Though a foreigner in Babylon, though he lived amid worshippers of strange gods, though he was surrounded by vice and sin, he was ever true to the God of his fathers. He was never ashamed of his religion and his God. He is a striking example of God's own promise, '**Them that honour Me, I will honour**' (1 Sam. ii. 30). [Recall his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, his advancement in the state, his rebuke of Belshazzar, and prediction of his downfall. What place did Belshazzar promise to Daniel if he would read the handwriting on the wall?]

Darius must have heard the part which Daniel took at Belshazzar's feast, and he was not long in learning for himself that an excellent spirit was in him. Accordingly when he divided the realm into one hundred and twenty provinces, and set a governor over each, Daniel was one of three presidents who were over all the rest, and of the three, Daniel soon became the first. He had a most responsible task. Governors of provinces to look after, complaints to hear, cases to investigate and decide. And he did all with wisdom and honour. What a treasure such a Prime Minister must have been to Darius! It brought glory to God when a man in the first place in the kingdom made no secret of his fear and reverence for Him. It honours God when His people, in whatever station, have a name for integrity and honour. Daniel's place of power was one both of temptation and of danger. In the East to this day the great officers of state are offered bribes, and have many opportunities of enriching themselves dishonestly. They are also objects of envy and jealousy to others who plot against them, and even attempt their life. So the other presidents and governors were jealous of Daniel, and

tried to find ground for accusing him to the king. But they could find nothing. What a testimony to the purity of his life! [In this Daniel was a figure of Jesus, against whom no fault could be found (Matt. xxvi. 59, 60; John xix. 4).] At last they thought they might make his religion a ground of fault against him. So they tried what they could do in this way.

II. **Daniel at Prayer** (vv. 6-15).—It was well known in Babylon that Daniel was constant and regular in prayer to the God of his fathers. Though he was the busiest man in the kingdom, **he found time to pray to God three times a day.** Though he was next to the throne in the realm, he was not ashamed to be seen at his open window praying to his God—on his knees, with his face towards Jerusalem. [This was a beautiful custom of the Jews, following God's promise (1 Kings viii. 44). At the temple in Jerusalem God had been wont to meet with His people. Unable to get to the spot, the exiles in distant lands looked towards it when they sought Him. It helped their faith. In Alexandria and Cairo, and other cities of the East, the Moslem may be seen spreading down his carpet on the street, with his face towards Mecca, which is to him what Jerusalem was to the Jew.] What an example Daniel sets to us! However busy we may be, we should find time for prayer, and not merely hurried prayer, but prayer like Daniel's, reverent and devout. (Compare David, Ps. lv. 17; cxix. 164.) [The Moslem is called to prayer five times a day.] And we should not be ashamed to be seen at prayer. [In *Tom Brown's School Days*, a little boy, newly come to school, dropped on his knees by his bedside before the other boys, was laughed at, and had a slipper flung at him. He did not mind, but continued to do it, and soon the other boys followed his example.]

Knowing Daniel's custom, his enemies fell upon a wicked but clever device. Among ancient nations the king was often looked upon as the representative of the gods, and even worshipped as a god. Being the representative of the gods, he could not make mistakes, and therefore his decrees could not be altered. So Daniel's enemies proposed that divine honours should be paid to the king for thirty days, and asked Darius to decree that whosoever should pray to any God or man for that time should be cast into the den of lions. This flattered the vanity of the king, and he signed the decree. It was aimed at Daniel, and Daniel knew it well, though the king did not. Did Daniel give up his daily habit of prayer to the God of his fathers? Not in the least; **he prayed to God as he did aforetime.** This was just what his enemies wished, so they accused him to the king, who was very sorry, but the law was unalterable and had to take its course. [Polycarp, one of the first Christian martyrs, was offered his life if he would pray in the name of Cæsar and revile Christ. But he answered, 'Eighty and six years have I been His servant, and He never did me any wrong; how can I blaspheme my King, my Saviour?']

III. **Daniel in the Den of Lions** (vv. 16-28).—It was sorely against the will of the king that Daniel was cast into the den of lions. But his own vanity and weakness had brought this fate upon his faithful Prime Minister. He could but console himself with the hope that Daniel's God whom he served continually would deliver him now. So Daniel was thrown among the wild beasts, and a stone placed over the mouth of the den, sealed with the king's signet, and the signet of his lords, that no one might tamper with

it. Which of the two, the king or Daniel, had the more comfortable night? The king was miserable. He would have no music that night in the palace, and he got no sleep upon his bed. Early in the morning he rose and went in haste to the den of lions. Did he find Daniel devoured by the wild beasts? By no means. To his lamentable cry, 'O Daniel, is thy God able to deliver thee?' Daniel answered cheerfully and courteously, 'O king, live for ever.' It had been a grand night for Daniel. He had not sat trembling in case the lions should devour him at any moment. [Illustrate by the well-known story of *Androcles and the Lion.*] God had sent His angel to shut the lions' mouths, and neither tooth nor claw had touched him. **He had had a bright angel in the gloomy den for company,** and **an assurance of the love and care of his God which filled him with joy.** It was a wonderful deliverance.

'Do not fear to tread the fiery furnace,
Do not shrink the lions' den to share,
For the God of Daniel will deliver;
He will send His angel there.'

Darius was overjoyed at the safety of Daniel, and it was in accordance with the cruel customs of the times that he had his accusers with their families cast into the den of lions to be savagely devoured. He caused also the story of Daniel's deliverance to be published throughout the kingdom, and in this way the honour and glory of the God of Israel was spread far and wide. The incident redounded again to the honour of the faithful prophet who prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

SPIRITUAL LESSON

We are taught here by the courageous example of Daniel to let nothing come between us and the gracious privilege of prayer. Don't say, you have no time to pray, you have so many lessons to learn, and so much to do. Daniel found time with an empire on his shoulders. Don't be ashamed to pray, and don't be laughed out of prayer by those who make a mock at religion. Be earnest and steadfast like Daniel. You will feel God's presence the nearer, if people try to hinder your prayers. And people will respect you for your sincerity. 'When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him' (Prov. xvi. 7).

'Courage, brother! do not stumble,
Though thy path be dark as night;
There's a star to guide the humble;—
Trust in God, and do the right.

'Simple rule, and safest guiding,
Inward peace, and inward might;
Star upon our path abiding,—
Trust in God, and do the right.'

TO THE TEACHER

A very beautiful illustration of this story will be found in the next last chapter of Professor A. J. Church's charming tale of the Early Christians, *To the Lions.*

XL.—NEHEMIAH'S MISSION TO HIS COUNTRY

Nehemiah i., ii.

Introduction.—Ninety years have passed since Daniel was cast into the den of lions. The royal city is now no longer Babylon, but Shushan, or Susa, as it is elsewhere called. Events of great importance to the Jewish exiles have taken place meanwhile. You remember how they had set their hopes on **Cyrus the Persian**, who captured Babylon. What was Isaiah's prediction concerning Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 13; Lesson XXXVIII.)? Jeremiah, too, had foretold that the exile would last seventy years (Jer. xxix. 10). Accordingly, when seventy years had passed (606-536 B.C.), the hour and the man had come. Cyrus, influenced perhaps by Daniel and the Jews, issued a decree giving liberty to the Jews to return to their own land (Ezra i. 1-4). It was only a part of them who took advantage of the liberty. Many had lost their love for the home of their fathers, and many had now possessions and places which they found it hard to give up. Over 40,000 men returned, with **Zerubbabel** at their head. First of all they set to rebuild the temple which lay in ruins, and after much opposition, and a delay of nearly twenty years, it was dedicated again to the worship of God (Ezra vi.)

Years passed away, and the zeal of the returned exiles for the service of God had cooled down. Eighty years after the Return, **Ezra**, known as the scribe, had gone up from Babylon to Jerusalem and carried through important reforms (Ezra vii. 6 ff.) Owing to his efforts and influence, the Book of the Law (Neh. viii.-x.) was restored to its place of authority both in the state and in the lives of the people. The efforts of **Ezra** were warmly taken up by **Nehemiah**. By these two men, what we call **Judaism** was placed on a sure foundation; and the Law became henceforth the rule of life, the bond of union, and the badge of nationality to the Jewish people. From the days of Ezra and Nehemiah **the law and the prophets** were read in the synagogues or meeting-houses, where the people in towns and villages assembled on the Sabbath day for public worship. [This is what we read about so often in the Gospels: Jesus worshipped and taught in the synagogues.] Thus **the hope of a Messiah** (Lesson XXXIV.) was kept alive, and faithful hearts were prepared to expect a Saviour, and to welcome Him when He came. But a troubled period of over four centuries and a half was still to elapse before John the Baptist was sent preaching: 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

In considering to-day's lesson think of

I. **Nehemiah's Love for his Country.**—Nehemiah was a Jew of noble character, who like Joseph with Pharaoh, and Daniel with Darius, stood high in the service of the Persian king Artaxerxes. He was the king's cupbearer —it was his duty to taste the wine before it was given to his royal master, and his place was one of honour and of trust. He had frequent access to the king, and from the nature of his office could speak to him freely. But high as was his station, and comfortable as was his lot, Nehemiah's heart was not in Shushan, but in the land of his fathers and the city of his fathers' sepulchres, Jerusalem. [Illustrate by the Swiss who pines and dies away

from his native mountains, and the Scotchman in a far-off land, who often thinks of home and of the churchyard where his kindred sleep.] Nehemiah could have said, like many a Jew of old, and like many a Jew to this day—

'O how the Lord's song shall we sing
Within a foreign land?
If thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
Skill part from my right hand.'

His love for his country takes practical expression in various ways. 1. **His eager inquiries after his countrymen in Jerusalem** (i. 1-3). Hanani, one of his brethren—a Jew like himself—had come back from Jerusalem to Shushan. This was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and ninety years after the Return. Eagerly Nehemiah questions him as to the condition of the Jews, and receives a sad account of them. Hanani tells him of the heathen enemies who gave them trouble, and who mocked their efforts to restore the city. But what goes most to Nehemiah's heart is the picture which Hanani gives of the wall of Jerusalem still broken down, and the gates remaining as they had been burnt with fire. It was sad for a city in those days to be without a wall; it was then defenceless and exposed to attacks from enemies all round. This sorely grieved Nehemiah.

2. **His sorrow for the ruined state of Jerusalem** (v. 4).—On hearing the tidings from Jerusalem Nehemiah sat down and wept. And months after, as we read (ii. 1-4), he was sad at heart and sad of face. [Illustrate by the Jews in Jerusalem of to-day, who meet every Friday afternoon at the Wailing Place, close to the remains of the old temple wall, and weep over the ruin of the temple and city now.]

3. **His prayer to God for his people** (vv. 5-10).—Nehemiah did well to take his trouble to God. He had not forgotten God at Artaxerxes' court, and he speaks to God and of God as his nearest friend (ii. 8; v. 19). As he prays, he confesses his own and his people's sins. This shows how deep was his sense of God's holiness, and of his people's disobedience. But he also reminds God of His promise given to Moses long before (Lev. xxvi. 40-44), and tells Him that though they had sinned they still are His by covenant and by redemption. The prayer shows us how good Nehemiah was, and also how we should come to God in prayer for our homes and our country. What a help it is in prayer to be able to plead God's promises to us or to our country! His prayer ends by asking God to grant him favour in the eyes of the king, and to prosper the request he had to make of him.

II. **Nehemiah's Mission to his Country.**—It was in the ninth month of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes that Nehemiah got the bad news, and offered this prayer for his country. It was months before he found a right opportunity to make his request to the king.

1. **His petition to the king** (ii. 1-8).—Picture the scene. The king and queen seated at table on golden couches, and the banquet proceeding with mirth on every face. On every face but one. The cupbearer looks troubled, and the king condescends to ask his favourite the cause. Nehemiah is in fear. Perhaps he will be dismissed from his post or even put to death. For an Eastern king will punish sadness in his presence severely. But no! The king on hearing the cause asks him what he wished to have done.

Nehemiah thinks 'Now is my opportunity,' and he asks God to guide him aright. What an example again to us! As he stood, he lifted up his heart in prayer to God. Then he begged that he might be sent to Judah, unto the city of his fathers' sepulchres, that he might build it. For the sake of his country he would give up his post, so high and honourable. What unselfishness! He obtained his request and got leave for a time. More than that—he got letters from the king for his officers to escort him safe, and a letter to the king's forester at Jerusalem to supply the timber for the repairs he had in view. He got all he wished. And he ascribed it to God—'according to the good hand of my God upon me.' So he prepared to go to Jerusalem with the king's approval and with the powers of governor.

2. **His ride round the wall of Jerusalem** (vv. 9-16).—Escorted by officers and troops given him by the king, Nehemiah arrives after a long and tiresome journey at the Holy City. What mingled feelings in his heart as he gazed upon it first! Glad to see the city of David and Solomon and his fathers (compare Ps. cxxii.), but grieved to see its ruin and desolation. His coming was not welcomed by all. Who was grieved at it? And why? [There is usually some one ready to find fault with any attempt to begin a good work.] Before beginning operations, Nehemiah would see the condition of the city for himself. So one night, three days after his arrival, he went out mounted on a mule or an ass, with a few attendants on foot, and rode round the circuit of the city. An hour would easily take him round if he were merely having a ride, but he would stop to view the ruins and to plan the work of restoration. [This ride of Nehemiah is taken by travellers to Jerusalem at this day, only now the associations with the life and death of Jesus give it greater sacredness than ever.]

3. **His resolution to repair the walls** (vv. 17-20).—The Jews who returned with Zerubbabel had rebuilt **the temple**; Nehemiah resolved to rebuild **the walls of the city**. He told the chief people of his plans and of the king's words on the subject, and he carried them with him. Every good cause has enemies, and Nehemiah's enemies laughed him to scorn. Who were they? What did they say? But Nehemiah had an answer ready for them, **'The God of heaven He will prosper; therefore we His servants will arise and build'** (ii. 20). [This was Paul's comfort in his great work; Luther's in the Reformation; our Covenanting forefathers' in their troubled times.]

SPIRITUAL LESSON

Nehemiah is a fine example of **patriotism, unselfishness, courage,** and **integrity** all springing from the soil of true **piety** and **faith in God.** In particular, as Nehemiah took to heart the state of the land of his fathers, and gave up a splendid position to promote its interests, so we should be concerned for the state of Christ's Church, and should pray and deny ourselves to promote its welfare.

LESSONS

ON

THE LIFE, TEACHING, AND WORKS OF OUR LORD

FIRST PART

I.—BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke i. 5-20, 57-80

Introduction.—Children who have read about the Fall of man may have wondered why, since God meant to send His Son to be the Saviour of men, He did not send Him soon after men became sinners. He waited thousands of years. Why this? Because men had to be **prepared** for the coming of Jesus.

One preparation was, that they might learn their **need** of a Saviour. So God 'allowed all the (heathen) nations to walk in their own ways' (Acts xiv. 16), that the suffering which sin brought them to might teach them their need of a Saviour and prepare them to receive Him.

Another preparation was, that they should be **expecting** a Saviour. Among one people—the people of Israel—God sent holy prophets, who not only made them feel they were sinners, but age after age foretold Christ's coming. All the Old Testament tells of this preparation. And when the time for Jesus to come was quite near, God got ready a man to put a **finish** to this preparation,—the last of the prophets, and as great as any of them, —as great a man as had ever been in the world (Matt. xi. 11). Our lesson is to be about this man's birth, and you will see that God provided that he should have every advantage to fit him for his great and holy work.

I. **The Parents of John the Baptist.**—1. See that God chose he should have pious parents. Read vv. 5 and 6. (Zacharias and Elisabeth his parents. It is a great advantage to have devout parents; and Zacharias was a priest too; his work was to serve God in His temple.)

2. God chose that his parents should know that it was God Who had given them their child, and that, before ever he was born, they should know he was to be 'great in the sight of the Lord,' and to do the great work of preparing the way for Christ. This would make them bring him up with great care, great faith, and great hope.

II. **His Birth intimated by a Vision and a Sign.**—How did God let them know this? By a vision; and to make it surer the vision came to Zacharias on the highest day of his life, when he was nearest God and the place of God's presence.

Explain this. Priests divided into twenty-four courses, or sets. Each course served in temple a week at a time twice a year. Each day they decided by lot what work each should do. The burning of incense (explain) on the golden altar in the Holy Place was the most sacred piece of the priests' work, and as there were so many priests, no one was allowed this honour more than once in his life. It was when it came to him, and in the Holy Place itself, that Zacharias had the vision. Read how it happened, vv. 8, 9.

Describe the temple—a great square of buildings, round the courts where the people worshipped, which were open to the sky. Higher than the rest a small building roofed over and divided into two parts, the 'Holy Place' and (inside a **veil** that divided them) the 'Most Holy Place.' None but the High Priest ever went into the Most Holy Place, and he only once a year. Zacharias was now to go into the Holy Place, which was outermost. In it, three things,—table of shewbread on one side, golden candlestick of seven branches on the other, and the golden altar for incense in the middle, right before him as he entered. First burning ashes were put on the top of the altar, then the incense was thrown upon that; the fragrant smoke went up, and the people made that a time for prayer, that their prayers might go up with the smoke and be also fragrant to God. Read v. 10.

When Zacharias had done his work and prayed too in his heart, see what happened, vv. 11, 12. Then he was told of the son God was to give him, v. 13. See too how many great things about this son, v. 14 (he would make his parents glad and many more people besides). v. 15, **True** greatness; and—like Samson and Samuel—(a Nazarite) never taste strong drink. 'He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.' God gives His Holy Spirit to warm people's hearts to good things.

This child of Zacharias would have a great love to God and to good from as early as he knew anything, v. 16; see Daniel xii. 3. v. 17—from this Zacharias would know his son was the person foretold in Malachi iii. 1 and iv. 5, 6, and would be Christ's forerunner.

Zacharias could hardly believe all this. He might have felt sure that this messenger was from God, and that nothing is impossible with God. But it seemed too good to be true, and he asked (v. 18). The angel told him who he was (see Daniel viii. and ix.), and gave him a sign that what he heard was from God; but to rebuke his unbelief it was a painful sign. v. 20 (dumb).

III. **His Birth was celebrated with a Song of Praise.**—The child was born as the angel said, v. 57. The parents were very happy to have the child, and we see that they now believed all that Zacharias was told by the angel, for at his circumcision, which was like our baptism, and was done when child a week old, they would not give the child any name but what the angel had said, vv. 58-63. Now God relieved Zacharias of his dumbness, v. 64. The people round about began to expect great things of this child, vv. 65, 66. And now we may see how strong in faith Zacharias had grown, how full of the Holy Ghost and how fit to bring up this child and prepare him for his great work. We may see this by the song or psalm of praise and prophecy which he spake, v. 67. Read from v. 68. Zacharias was as sure that the Saviour was near as if he had come —the very Saviour who had been promised to Abraham and to David, and spoken of by all the prophets. None of their enemies would now be able to hinder them from serving God (vv. 68-75). Zacharias was a **very** good man. He was glad to have a son, and glad that his son was to have the honour of preparing the way for Christ; but he was **more** glad that the Saviour was coming. He does not speak of his son in this song till far on in it, v. 76, and then only for one verse. The song ends with praise for

God's mercy and for the forgiveness of sins that Christ would bring. So the Saviour's coming would be sweet and joyful as the dawn of day is to people who have been sitting in darkness waiting for light to show them a way of safety, vv. 77-79.

IV. **His Character as a Boy and a Young Man.**—See what kind of boy and young man this child became. v. 80—'grew' in body: grew to be strong in spirit, *i.e.* able to say No! and overcome temptation to sin. 'Was in the deserts' probably means that after his old parents died he spent some years away from the wickedness and noise of the world, getting himself ready for the time when God should call him.

LESSON

See that you be **growing strong in spirit.** Be sure that God has a work for each of you to do in the world—not so great as John's; but any work for God in the world is great. God **needs** you for it. Your work cannot be done by any one else, and if you are to do it well you should be getting ready for it early, as John did, and the best preparation is to be **growing strong in spirit.** Are you getting better at saying 'No' when anybody wants you to do wrong? and at controlling your temper and your tongue? Are you more able to be patient? Are you getting better at doing good whenever it comes into your mind to do it? Are you keeping your heart pure? **'My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure.'**

It is well if you are growing strong in your body and getting well on with your lessons; but for God's work seek most to grow strong in spirit. If you have good parents, that is an advantage. If you have good friends, they will help you. If you can read about good men, that will help you. But the great thing is to ask Jesus to give you the Holy Spirit in your heart. That makes the heart pure and the spirit strong, even though it was not pure and not strong before.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The Key-word of this lesson is **Preparation.**

1. **Preparation** was needed before the Saviour came (of two kinds, that men might **feel their need** and that some might be **expecting** Him. Tell of the prophets, as far as the children can take it in; but especially of God sending this last of them to **finish** the preparation).

2. The preparation of this man himself. God's choosing that he should have parents fitted to bring him up—(1) pious; (2) aware from the first what great work to prepare him for; (3) with a home in which the expectation of Christ's coming was great and happy (see Zacharias's song).

3. The success of this education—'waxed strong in spirit,' and lesson from this.

II.—BIRTH OF JESUS

Luke i. 26-38 ; ii. 1-20

Introduction.—This lesson tells of the greatest event that ever happened in the world—the coming into it of a Saviour to save men from sin, which is the cause of all sorrow. God had made long preparation for this event (as we learnt in last lesson), and many were hoping for a Saviour ; but when He came, it was in a way so unexpected that nobody would have known it was happening if God had not told some. God's ways are not as ours. God is wiser than men, and so He does things in ways that men don't expect. But afterwards they begin to see the wisdom of what He has done, and the wisest say with thankful hearts, 'He hath done all things well.' If we had thought about the coming Saviour, we would have expected a mighty angel, perhaps, to come, and to bring great power with him—heavenly power. God sent more than an angel,—His own Son, but without any power at all. He came a little child. He was God's Son, and could have come any way He chose, but He laid aside all His heavenly glory and power, and came to be born into the world as we are born, to be nothing but a child and grow up slowly to manhood. He needed when a child His mother to nourish Him, to care for Him, keep Him safe, teach Him. It is much better that He came in that way ; we love Him more for it. It is a happy thing to love our Saviour. It makes it easier to obey Jesus if we love Him, and we can love Him much better when we know He was born a child like ourselves, than if He had come in power and glory like an angel, so that He could not be hurt by anything.

God chose that His mother should be a poor woman. Her name was Mary. She was young and loved God's Word. He had no earthly father. God was His Father ; but Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, and who became her husband, was also good. He was a carpenter. Perhaps Jesus was better able to be a Saviour on account of being born poor. God must have seen it would suit better for Jesus to be brought up in a poor home. [David Livingstone, the great missionary, had 'poor and pious parents.' When he became a man and thought about this, he was glad that they were pious, and glad too that they were poor.]

I. **The Birth.**—The first seven verses (Luke ii.) tell us how that happened. Joseph and Mary had their home at a place called Nazareth. But the Emperor of Rome ('Cæsar Augustus'), who ruled almost all the world that had then been discovered, wanted to know how many people there were in his dominions and how much money or land they had, so that he might know what share of the taxes they could pay. So he made a decree that 'all the world should be enrolled.' In the Holy Land their names were not put down where they lived, but where they came from originally—where their forefathers lived. Joseph and Mary were 'of the house and lineage of David,' and do you recollect where David lived? Where did he keep his father's flock when a lad? At Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary, therefore, had to go about seventy miles to Bethlehem to get their names enrolled in the books for the taxing. Bethlehem was a mountain village six miles south from Jerusalem. But many other people had come before

them for the same purpose. There was no room for them in the inn; they had to take shelter in the stable (the place for the asses and other animals), and there Jesus was born. Mary wrapped Him in swaddling clothes (explain), and for want of a cradle, laid Him in a manger (explain). What a place for the Son of God to be born in! It would have been very lowly in Him to stoop from His heavenly throne and become a child on earth in a king's palace; but He became the child of a poor woman and was born in a stable. (Read vv. 1-7, and question on what told.)

II. **The Message from Heaven.**—This was the greatest event that ever happened in the world. Did it look like that? Would any one have guessed that the birth of a poor woman's child in a stable in a little town was that? It was so unlike, that even Mary might have doubted, though she had been told before by an angel who her child would be (i. 26-35). And other people when told might have doubted if it could be true. So God sent a message and sign from heaven—angels to show how great an event this was in the sight of those who dwell in heaven; vv. 8-20 tell how this happened.

Read v. 8. We see here what time this message came—'by night.' And to whom? To shepherds. Why were they out at night? Watching their flocks to keep them safe from wolves and bears. These were, of course, humble men; but I have no doubt they were good men who had been praying for and expecting a Saviour. So God chose them to give His message to; for 'He satisfieth the longing soul' (Ps. cvii. 9). If people are longing for heavenly blessing, God never fails to give it them.

How did it happen? Read v. 9. An angel stood beside them, and light from heaven shone round about them. No wonder they were much afraid. But the angel spoke to them, and the first thing he said to them was, 'Do not be afraid; I have good news for you—very good news; and not for you only, but for everybody. A Saviour is born for you this day in the city of David, the very Saviour long foretold and prepared for, the Anointed One, the Messiah (Old Testament, Lesson XXXIV.) whom the Scriptures spoke of.' (Explain 'Christ.' Greek word for **anointed**—kings were anointed with oil, and the Scriptures spoke of the Saviour as **The** Anointed, because He was to be **God's** Anointed.) Read vv. 10, 11. The angel next told the shepherds a mark by which they would be able to find the child,—a good mark. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Read v. 12. Was not this mark enough? Would there be any other child in the village in such a strange and poor place as that? The angel spoke, and then all of a sudden a multitude of angels were seen beside him, who sang and praised God. Read vv. 13, 14. Was it not a wonderful thing for these shepherds to hear some of the praise of heaven, a song of praise sung by angels? It would show them how great a thing had happened: heaven was glad about it. It was a short song; you can easily learn it (v. 14). You have often sung much the same in metre—'**Hark the herald angels.**' When you sing that, you are like joining in the praise of angels.

Back to heaven the bright ranks of angels went, leaving the shepherds again by themselves, with no light round them but the stars. Then they said, 'We have heard from God; let us go and see the Saviour.' They put off

no time, and they found exactly as the angel had told them. Read vv. 15, 16. It was well the angel gave them the sign; for I doubt if even these good men would have believed so lowly a child to be God's Anointed; but now we may be sure they rejoiced the more to find the Saviour come in so lowly a way. Did they keep the good news to themselves? No (vv. 17, 18). So the angels were the first to preach Jesus on earth, and the shepherds the next. Read v. 19. It must have been a great joy to Mary to hear what the shepherds told. If for a moment she began in her hardships and in this mean birthplace to doubt if her child were indeed the Son of the Highest, as she had been told (i. 32), now she would feel assured again. Did Mary go boasting or talking much about her child? No; but she **thought** much about all she had been told, and this made her more fit for the charge God had given her of this Holy Child. Read also v. 20.

LESSONS

We too may rejoice and be glad about all this as the shepherds did; it is good news for us; for—

1. It is happy to know that we have **so great** a Saviour,—far greater than any angel,—God's eternal Son. This makes it safe and easy **to trust Him.** We are sure He is able to save.

2. It is happy to know that we have so **lowly** a Saviour. The Son of God came to live amongst us and be like ourselves. Angels have come into the world when God sent them to do good to men; but none of them became a man and dwelt among us. They only had the appearance of men, so as to be seen and heard when they spoke to men for a little while. But Jesus became a man. He was a child like us, and is still a man; in fact, He is our **brother.** This makes it easy **to love** Him.

3. It is happy to know that God did not send 'His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him,' etc. (John iii. 17). God might have sent His Son in power and glory to punish all the wickedness of men. But we find that God sent His Son as a child, to grow up a man and save His brethren. This makes it easy for us **to love God,** for it makes us sure that He loves us.

FOR THE TEACHER

The passage i. 26-38 is to be only shortly referred to at the point where it is brought in.—'Swaddling clothes.' 'Babies in Palestine are still wrapped in strips of cotton cloth about six inches broad and three yards long.'—Along with the birth in the stable may be told the story of Luther's birth in a room of a public-house in the town of Eisleben, in the confusion of a market day,—his mother being the wife of a poor miner who had come to the market.—'Glory to God.' This may be explained either as a wish or as a prophecy. 'Goodwill toward men' was always in God, but it would now be made manifest.—Let the teacher try to convey to the children that the Son of God became a real child, exchanging all power for the actual weakness of a child.

III.—JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

Luke ii. 21-39

Introduction.—To-day again our lesson is to be about Jesus when He was a baby. It is good for us, whether we are old or young, to think of the childhood of Jesus, because it inclines us to love Him. We could not be afraid of a baby; we readily love a baby; and when we read about Jesus as a baby we are made sure that He became like ourselves, and stooped to be really one of us. It would seem improper and irreverent to speak of Him as having been a baby, if it were not true. He was cared for by His mother as other babies are, and He was treated like other babies. What we read to-day tells of two things that were done to other children then and were done to Him, even though He did not need them.

I. **Jesus circumcised.**—You all know a thing we do to children now,—we have them *baptized*. You have seen a child baptized? You remember that water was used in the baptism? What did it mean? Cleansing (or washing) from sin. The Jews also did a thing to children which had much the same meaning. It was called *circumcision*. But did Jesus need cleansing from sin? Had He any sin in His heart? No. So He did not need circumcision. But it was done to Him. Why? See Heb. ii. 17, '*It behoved Him to be made in all things like His brethren.*' It was done at the same time as to other Jewish boys—when eight days old; and His name was given Him then, as you get your names at your baptism. What was His name? Did His parents choose it themselves (i. 31)? Read v. 21. Why is this name sweet to hear? Because it means *Saviour*, and it fits Jesus well, because He *saves* His people from their sins (Hymn 186).

II. **Jesus presented in the Temple.**—I must tell you now of another thing that was done to some Jewish children and to Jesus. The first-born son (eldest boy) in every family was counted God's own servant, to be employed in God's own work in the temple—to open and shut the doors, as Samuel did, and the like. But God chose one of the twelve tribes (Levi) for this work, and allowed other first-born children to be merely presented to him in the temple, and bought out from service there by a small sum of money. Did Jesus need to be bought out from God's service? No; He was to serve God all His life, as constantly as if He had lived in the temple. But this too was done to Him as to other children, and His mother made an offering to God at the same time. It was done when Jesus was about six weeks old. Joseph and Mary set out from Bethlehem to go to Jerusalem. Mary would ride on an ass or an ox and carry Jesus in her arms. They came to the temple, and went as far into that great building as women were allowed to go. They stood at a great gate till the priest should come, take the child to present it to the Lord, and also take Mary's own offering which she had brought. Did the child look different from other children? No. Did the priest see any greatness in the child? No. He would know that Joseph and Mary were poor; for Mary's offering was two pigeons. Had

she been rich it would have been a lamb and a pigeon (Lev. xii. 6-8). Read vv. 22-24. The priest would think this a common child of poor parents. How little he knew! We cannot tell in looking at a baby that it is to be great some day. When the child of a poor miner and his wife was born four hundred years ago in a room of a public-house in the confusion of a market-day, who that saw the child could have guessed that he was to be greater than a king's son, and be honoured for hundreds of years? (It was Martin Luther.) Pious mothers sometimes pray for their child, that 'many may rejoice at his birth'; but they cannot *know*. There are some babies now who are to be great governors, generals, poets, preachers forty years after this; but nobody that sees them can guess it. When Jesus was presented in the temple at six weeks old, there was no sign of what He would be and would do.

But a strange thing happened. A man came into the temple just at the time Joseph and Mary and the child were there, and he knew! He knew what that child was to be. He was able that day to tell beforehand that the child was to be the glory of Israel and the light of the whole world.

How did he come to know this? I will tell you. He was a very good and holy man. He had read in the prophets that God was to send One who would be a King, a Saviour, and a Consolation. He prayed much that this Deliverer might come—the Lord's Anointed (or *Christ*). And God heard his prayers and revealed to him in his heart—made him feel sure in his heart—that he would see this King and Saviour before he died. Simeon (that was his name) was now an old man, but he was a joyful and hopeful old man, for his heart was glad with the assurance God had given him—that he would see the One who was to make a new and better world.

Well, this day in his house at Jerusalem it came into his heart from God that he must go to the temple. And when he was there God showed him that the child which Joseph and Mary brought was the King and Saviour he expected. He knew the words, 'To us a child is born' (Isa. ix.), and, besides, old people are ready to hope great things of young children. So he believed at once what God showed him, and his heart was so filled with gladness, he took the child in his arms and uttered aloud a song of praise to God, which meant that he was willing to die now, would die in peace, because God had been so good to him, and he had seen the great thing he wished to see in this world before leaving it. Read vv. 25-32.

Joseph and Mary were standing by wondering, and then the old man turned and blessed them, and told Mary more about her child. This old man knew that Jesus would be *spoken against*—that suffering would mingle with glory in His life, and that Mary herself would suffer, and it was well that Mary should be warned of this too. (For the 'piercing through her soul,' see John xix. 25.) Read vv. 33-35.

Did other people at that time look for a Saviour? Yes; and one came in just then,—an old, old woman, who spent so much time praying and fasting (explain) in the temple, she might be said to live there. Her name was Anna; she joined in praising God, and went to tell the others who were waiting for God's promise. Read vv. 36-38.

LESSONS

I think you children may learn something from this story of how people were made glad at the sight of Jesus even when He was a child, because they hoped for so much good from Him. When you were a baby, perhaps your father and mother often thought that you might be a great comfort to them as you grew older. They expected it. God put it into their hearts to expect it, because He had given you to them. Now I hope it will come into your hearts to wish and try to be a blessing to them. Children are a blessing from the very first, when they are good and loving and obedient; because this is not only pleasant to their parents at the time, but it fills their hearts with such hope of what their children will be and do when they grow older. I have heard of a girl whom her father called his 'heart's-ease,' and of another who was called in her home 'mother's blessing.'

And if you would wish to be like Jesus, it may come into your hearts to try to be a blessing to many people besides your parents. If this comes strongly into your heart when you are young, it is very likely that many people will be glad that ever you were born. A boy of eight years old in Glasgow was suffering much from hardship and poverty, and it came into his heart that if God spared him to grow up and prospered him, he would remember poor children. Now he has quite a village of houses into which he receives poor deserted children, feeds, clothes, and educates them, and many thousands have been glad of that thought which came into his heart when he was a poor boy of eight (Mr. Quarrier of the Scottish Orphan Homes).

FOR THE TEACHER

In this and other lessons the teaching is fuller than can be given to most children of from seven to ten. It is left to the teacher to put the main interest of the lesson chiefly before them, and give only what they can easily take in of such matters as the Jewish customs in vv. 22-25.

IV.—JESUS AND THE WISE MEN—FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Matt. ii. 1-15

I. Strangers in Jerusalem.—Some time after our Lord Jesus was born at Bethlehem, a company of strangers appeared in Jerusalem. They were far-travelled men, from some of the countries a great way to the east of the Holy Land. They were rich men, almost princes in their own country, and their retinue of servants would be large, with many camels to carry them across the deserts. For months they had been journeying in order to reach Jerusalem; and now they told why they came so far—to worship the new-born King of the Jews. Read vv. 1, 2 and see what they said.

II. The Guiding Star.—The wisest men in these eastern countries—Chaldæa and Persia, where Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus were kings, where Daniel prophesied and Esther was queen—were called Magi. (Our word *magicians* comes from this; but it is a degradation of their name. These men were not necessarily deceivers.) They had the best knowledge of those regions and times; they were kings' counsellors; and what they studied with most zeal was the stars. In those countries the sky is a more splendid spectacle even than with us; the air being less clouded, and the stars therefore shining more brightly. There from remotest ages men studied the stars with diligence, not only on account of their glorious appearance, but as we would read a holy book; for they believed that the motions and appearances of stars were prophecies of things that were to happen in the world,—that all was written there beforehand if it could be read. Especially they thought that at the births of great men the stars had deep meaning. Now about the time of the birth of Jesus there came in sight in the heavens to these eastern wise men a new star (or a conjunction of stars), and such a thing could not happen without their trying to know its meaning. But for a while before this star appeared an expectation had spread in these lands that a king should be born in Judæa who would bring in a happy time for men,—a golden age. This expectation began from the Jews, companies of whom were scattered everywhere. These Jews spoke of the king they hoped for, and perhaps showed the books of their old prophets with many promises in them such as these: 'In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth . . . men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed' (Ps. lxxii.)

So when these wise men saw the star they quickly said, 'The King is born in Judæa, and this is His star; His glorious reign is at hand.' Was it a fancy? It was better than a fancy. God was in it. He was speaking to them in a tongue they could understand; He was writing with His finger in a book they were wont to read. He sent the star as a sign which would mean true to them. And so great a hope was stirred in them that they resolved to go and worship the new-born King; and arrived, as we saw, in Jerusalem with their great retinue, after a journey of months by famous cities, across great rivers, and over wide deserts.

III. **The troubled City.**—About them and their errand (recall their question) men in Jerusalem talked in troubled whispers. Herod the Great was then king. After a reign of nearly forty years he was known by all to be most terrible, cruel, jealous. His best-beloved wife and two sons whom he loved had been among those whom his dark suspicions had doomed to death. A foreigner by birth—of the hated race of Edom—he knew his subjects hated him. They, on their part, knew that any tidings like this of a rival king, though yet a child, would stir the old man's cruel jealousy and endanger all their lives. So this was the result of the wise men's coming; 'Herod the king was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.' Read v. 3.

IV. **Guidance from Herod.**—The reception they got in Jerusalem must have been very disappointing to the wise men. They expected this city to be ringing with the news and the joy of the great birth that had happened. Instead of this, nobody seemed to know of it or to care to hear of it. Had they been deceived then? and should they go back at once? It was a sore trial of their faith; but not for long. God provided a guide for them. He who made the star His messenger to them in the east, now makes the very wickedness of Herod serve their need. Who would have thought that Herod would be their guide? How was he able or willing? This is how it was. Prompted by his fears—even of a child—he sent for such men in Jerusalem as were learned in the Bible, and when they came together he asked them where the prophets said the Christ (see Lesson II.) was to be born. That was a question easily answered, for it was told in Micah v. 2. (Read vv. 4, 5, 6, and turn to Micah.) This answer was given in the council-room of the king, and soon it was filled by another company. The wise men from the East were summoned to an audience of the king. He tells them where to go; Bethlehem is the place. He asks questions and bids them return to him. Read vv. 7, 8. Murder was the king's purpose, not worship, and that he should guide them is almost as strange a thing as the star itself. It shows that God is able to make the wrath of man to praise Him, and the wickedness of bad men to serve His servants.

V. **Worship of the King.**—The wise men set out at once for Bethlehem (only six miles from Jerusalem), even though night was coming on. And now a fresh help from God was given that brought them to the very house. Read vv. 9, 10. God's help comes always at the best time, and after seeing the star again (they had not seen it since they left the East) they were ready to worship with joy even though they found the child in a very lowly place. He was no longer in the stable but in 'the house'; but it would be a lowly dwelling. See now these far-travelled men, venerable with age, clothed upon with the dignity of rank and wisdom, bowing there at the feet of the child Jesus, glad to humble themselves and to give Him the best they had as an offering! Read v. 11. (Gold has always been most precious. Frankincense is a costly sweet-smelling stuff to burn. Myrrh is a precious kind of gum. The gifts were fit for a king.)

God had used the wicked thought of Herod to guide them; but He would not suffer it to be fulfilled. He warned the wise men by a dream, and Joseph also in a similar manner. Read vv. 12, 13, 14, 15.

LESSONS

1. God doeth all things well. God had already brought it about that the child Jesus was owned and worshipped by humble shepherds, and by Simeon and Anna, who were examples of devout and instructed Israelites; and now God brings it about that Jesus is worshipped by *Gentiles*, by *great* men, by *wise* men. In these men who came from far the share that we Gentiles have in Jesus and the worship we owe Him was owned even in His childhood. In them the rank and the knowledge of the world bowed to the Saviour. These men completed this beautiful appointment of God, that the world without knowing it should send its representatives—of Jew and Gentile, prince and peasant, learned in the Scriptures and learned in the stars—to the cradle of Him who is Lord of all.

2. If we desire to find and worship Jesus, nothing in our position or circumstances will be allowed to prevent us having this joy. God will send guides. He will make the words of the Bible reach our ears. He will make things without life, like the stars, have a voice for us. He will make the worst enemies of the truth to be guides, like Herod, in spite of themselves, to truth and salvation.

3. If we 'walk in the light of the Lord' we shall, after our journey of life, see Jesus on His throne; we shall find His glory as sweet as the wise men found His childhood; and we shall worship Him with exceeding great joy.

V.—JESUS AT TWELVE YEARS OF AGE

Luke ii. 40-52

Introduction.—It is interesting to know something of the boyhood of great men. Often in a wonderful way the greatness of the man is found to have begun in the good dispositions and purposes of the boy. So 'the child is father of the man,' says Wordsworth.

We are therefore surprised to find so little told of the boyhood of the greatest life ever lived. Only these thirteen verses, most of them about one thing that happened when the boy was twelve. This is all from five to thirty years! Yet (finely said) 'it is like a beautiful floweret thrown to us over the wall of an enclosed garden, which makes us wish the more we could see all that grows therein.' Take it in three parts.

I. **Jesus from Five to Twelve.**—One verse only tells of early childhood (v. 40). But by thinking over it, and putting together the Jews' ways of bringing up children then, we may be sure of a good deal.

1. The **place** of His upbringing—Nazareth, a large village, near top of a hill in Galilee, looking south. Not like our remote Highlands, because much traffic on great roads near; but still out of the way. Not a place whose people had good character. 'Can any good thing,' etc. (John i. 46).

2. The **home** of Jesus small and humble—probably just one room with a low seat round the walls; a small, low table for the one dish out of which all ate. Small sleeping-places above, or on the roof.

3. Other children with Jesus in the house—**brothers** and **sisters** (Mark vi. 3). These were possibly children of Joseph by a former marriage (for see John xix. 25-27), or they may have been children of Joseph and Mary, younger than Jesus.

4. **Education.** Jesus would get His first lessons **from His mother.** But do you think He knew everything, and did not need education (v. 52)? If He made progress, He did **not** know everything at first. The truth is thus expressed—

> 'Was not our Lord a little child
> Taught by degrees to pray,
> By father dear and mother mild
> Instructed day by day?'

Would you like to know what Jesus would (like all Jewish boys) get first to learn by heart (Deut. vi. 4; Ps. civ., cxviii., cxxxvi.)? Next He would be taught in the **village school;** for the Jews had these, and were careful that children be taught in them. He would learn here to read and write and to know the Law of Moses. He would also **go with His mother to the synagogue** (Jewish church) every Sabbath, and even on week-days; and the Scriptures being read here, He would come to know them well.

5. I believe also He joined in the innocent plays of other children, took pleasure in the flowers (and those about Nazareth are many of them the same as our own wild-flowers) and in the fields. (He used the memory of these in preaching 'Consider the lilies'; 'Behold the fowls'; 'A sower went forth.')

Thus far He was like other children.

6. But one great difference—no **sin in His heart,** and He never yielded to any temptation, great or small. How sweet that which we call 'innocence' in a child! Jesus always perfectly innocent, and grew up so too as a boy; and more than that, for 'the grace of God was upon Him' (read again v. 40).

II. **Jesus at Twelve Years Old.**—Now we come to principal thing told in lesson—a journey Jesus made to Jerusalem at age of twelve.

Custom among Jews, especially devout, as Joseph and Mary, to go up yearly to Passover feast. Jesus went with them at twelve for first time. (Why **then?** About twelve a Jewish child began to take on **himself** the responsibility of keeping the Law. Up till then father reckoned more responsible than child. About twelve the latter became 'a son of the commandment'—like becoming a 'young communicant' now—and would go up with the older people to the Passover.)

Think how much Jesus had heard and read of Jerusalem and the temple there—the Holy City and God's Holy House. How glad His heart would be to go! The journey was of a happy kind. A great 'caravan' or company formed of neighbours, some on foot, women on asses, journeying slowly, taking four or five days on the road. Camping in tents at night, or under open sky, which even in spring is warm enough. Probably first saw Jerusalem from east—white walls and towers and splendid temple with gilded roof. What joy to Jesus to see all, and to be present with the multitude of worshippers, see the sacrifices, etc.! What an impression on Him! The Passover feast took one night and then seven days of holy rejoicing. When these ended, caravans re-formed and set out northwards again. Joseph and Mary did not see Jesus, but supposed He was somewhere in the large crowd. But no. He had stayed in Jerusalem. Intentionally disobeying? I think not, but had found the porch (or pillared arcade) in the temple where the men learned in the Law of God sat and taught. This of so great interest, Jesus engrossed, and returned still as if under holy compulsion ('I **must,**' in v. 49).

Joseph and Mary at end of first day (v. 44) returned (another day), and on third day in searching found Him in the semicircle of scholars, sitting on the ground, before the 'doctors,' who would be on their seats (so Paul was said to have **sat at the feet** of Gamaliel). What was He doing? Listening and asking questions (v. 46). (Explain that this was no forwardness, or 'disputing,' but according to the usual way of teaching,—and a good way.)

Joseph and Mary amazed (v. 48). As a child at home Jesus so modest they had not guessed His deep thought, and besides the questions put to Him and the things He heard would bring flashes from His mind as sparks are drawn from flint by steel. He would in this short time go very fast forward.

Answer of Jesus (v. 49). Interesting as the first word we know of Jesus speaking; and this saying shows Him already calling **God 'My Father.'** He was the first on earth who felt God so near, and felt so truly as a son to God as to be able to call Him 'My Father.' The glory of all the life of Jesus is that He felt God near Him and with Him as His Father. This saying at twelve is the first ray of that glory shining forth (John i. 14).

We see Joseph and Mary had not taught Him this, for (v. 50) they did not quite understand it, in spite of all they were told about the time of His birth. How did He learn so to feel and speak? It came into His heart from God. And indeed if any human heart were perfectly pure as His, it would come easily to call God **Father.** (And we know the grace of God was upon Jesus from the beginning, v. 40.)

III. **Jesus from Twelve onwards.**—He was already above His earthly parents in knowledge. Did He now cast off their authority (v. 51)? Beautiful and dutiful—the more that His obedience would be partly in doing menial work. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet long after this, was He going back to such as He had done at his mother's bidding? He would soon also do apprentice work for Joseph.

One verse more gives us a glimpse (v. 52). He grew taller in body; He came to know more and more, and had deeper thoughts; God loved Him better and better, and man loved Him better and better. He grew up toward manhood in a beautiful youth, pure as a white flower, holy and loving in heart, and glad in the favour of God.

LESSONS

1. 'Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.' Jesus chose to do this when He was a child, and you can please Him by following His example. Children often think their parents mistaken in the commands they give. Jesus at twelve was wiser far than Joseph and Mary, but for years after, 'He was subject unto them.'

2. Seek to be like Jesus in the way He felt when a boy to God. Know God as your Heavenly Father, and love to do His will. But, oh! perhaps you say, 'I cannot; the right feeling is crushed out of my heart by fear. I am afraid because I have sinned.' You say you have thought wicked thoughts, and done wrong, and are not like Jesus, so you cannot feel to God as He did and say, Father! But Jesus knows that, and if you wish to have a clean heart, to have a beautiful youth like His, and to have all your sins forgiven, come to Him; He is able to do all this for you, and make your heart glad to think of God, and warm with love when you say 'Our Father which art in heaven.'

FOR THE TEACHER

It is not necessary to use all the material given above, but just as much as time and the capacity of the children allow.

VI.—JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS

Matt. iii. 13-17; John i. 19-37; iii. 25-36

I. **The Forerunner.**—Many years (eighteen) passed after that time in Jesus' boyhood that we read of last. The people who knew about His birth, and how great an event it was, were few; most of them had now died and these matters were forgotten. But now, after so many years, a rumour began of a great preacher or prophet in 'the wilderness of Judæa.' Strange appearance. His dress—a shirt of camel's hair (like coarse flannel—usually called 'sackcloth' in Bible, a sign of mourning), with a narrow belt of leather round his waist. His hair, uncut all the thirty years he had lived, hung down long over his back. His food was coarse too—locusts (the poor boil these insects in salted water, dry them in the sun, and then eat them), and honey of wild bees, which he found in the rocks of the desert. He never drank wine or strong drink all his life. A great stir was made; for his dress was the same as Elijah's, and meant that he was a prophet in mourning for the sins of the people; and his preaching was very terrible. He kept crying, 'The Christ is coming, and you are not ready for Him.' 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' He did not come into the cities, but the people flocked out into the wilderness from all the Holy Land to hear him—poor and rich, people and priests, publicans and soldiers.

Who was this strange preacher? It was John, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth—the man whom God chose to finish the preparation for the coming of Christ (Lesson I.) He himself had been prepared by living long alone with God in the deserts, and now God had shown him that the time was at hand for Christ to appear, and he felt in his heart a call from God to tell the people this, and that if they did not change their life (repent) Christ's coming would be judgment and wrath on them. Many did repent. Them he baptized. He stood in the flowing stream of Jordan. One by one they came to him, confessed their sins—or the worst of them—aloud; then he plunged them in the water as a sign that their sins were now washed away, and that they were ready for the Christ. From this he was called 'John **the Baptist.**'

After six months of his preaching, there came one day to him a young man about his own age. John did not know him, though he was a relation, for John (you see) had lived mostly alone in the deserts. This young man was a carpenter from Nazareth, and was dressed like other people; but John, who was accustomed to faces marked and agitated by sin, saw holiness, grace, goodness in his face. Perhaps he talked with him. He perceived him to be far better and holier than himself, and when this young man asked for baptism, he refused, saying, 'I have need to be,' etc. Who was this young man? Jesus. He was now thirty years of age. You remember how good He was at twelve. He had been increasing in wisdom and in favour with God all the eighteen years since then. Did Jesus need baptism? Had He any sins to wash away? No; but He chose to use the same means of good that God appointed for others—went to church, for example, like others, though nobody could preach wisdom like His own. So He wished to be baptized and get ready in that way for the new kingdom,

as others were doing. ('Suffer it to be.') So John baptized Him, and a wonderful thing happened. When Jesus was going up out of the river, the sky opened above Him; what seemed a dove came fluttering down upon Him,—it was the Holy Spirit in shape of a dove,—and a Voice said, 'This is My beloved Son.' John saw the dove and knew now who this was. This was the sign God had given him by which he would know the Christ, who was coming to set up the new kingdom of God. Read Matt. iii. 13-17.

II. **The Witness.**—Now the work that John came for was mostly done, though he had only preached six months. He came to be Christ's **forerunner,** and Christ had now come. But John continued as a **witness** to Christ, telling people **He is come,** rejoicing to point Him out, direct people to Him, and praise Him. Turn to John i. 19-27, and see how he did this.

About six weeks after Jesus' baptism, a deputation was sent from the chief priests and Pharisees at Jerusalem to examine John, because he had never got leave from *them* to preach or baptize. They thought he was taking too much upon him. They asked him if he was the Christ, or Elijah (Mal. iv.), or the prophet that was expected (Deut. xviii.) He always said no. He said he was just a **voice;** the voice spoken of by Isaiah the prophet (Isa. xl.) that was to prepare for Christ. Read i. 19-28, and show how John made little of himself and his baptism (only with water), and how he praised Jesus (vv. 26, 27). What praise this!

Next day after this, Jesus was among the crowd and was coming toward John. Then John pointed Him out, and see what a sweet name he gave Him, and how great a thing he said Jesus would do (v. 29). Then John went on to tell what we know—how he came to know Jesus (vv. 30-34).

Next day again John saw Jesus and pointed Him out—spoke of Him so that two of his own disciples left him and followed Jesus (vv. 35-37).

Was John displeased at their leaving him and following Jesus? No. And when by and by some of his disciples (for he had more who loved him and stayed with him) were displeased to find that the crowds of people were leaving their master and going to Jesus, John was not in the least jealous. He told them, 'I have got my place from God, and He has got His. Nobody can be anything but what God gives to him to be. His place is far higher than mine. He is the Bridegroom; I am only the friend of the Bridegroom; but I am content with my own place; I am glad of it. Jesus **must** grow greater and greater. I must grow less beside Him; but that is all right.' Read iii. 26-30.

LESSONS

1. **Should we not admire John?** We may admire him because he was so brave, telling people that they needed to repent, and because he did not care for any good things of this world if he could do the work God gave him. But he is even more to be admired for being so gentle and humble and unselfish. It is very fine when a brave man is also a gentle man. It is also fine when a man who has been very high up or very popular, is willing to come down and let another man be counted better than he and higher. John did this quite gladly; he had pleasure in making himself little after Jesus came. If we had heard John preach terribly, as

he did at first, we might have thought him proud; but he was very humble.

Should not children try to be like John in this? If we are angry at other people being thought more of than we are, is this like John? **Fill your own place** and be content, as he was.

'Jesus bids us shine;
You in your small corner,
I in mine.'

'Honour and shame from no condition rise.
Act well your part; there all the honour lies.'

2. **Should we not admire Jesus?** Think what He must have been—that young man from Nazareth, a carpenter and like others in dress—when John at once felt Him so far holier and better than himself. Think what holy gentleness John must have seen in Jesus when he called Him 'the Lamb of God'! (I suppose John had been thinking of Gen. xxii. 8, 'God will provide Himself a lamb,' etc., and thought Jesus was just that.) John knew that he could rebuke sin; but he felt that Jesus could do far more,—bear it away; Jesus would bear the sin of the world on Himself and take it away.

3. A serious question. **What are we doing now that we have been told of Jesus?** Preachers of the Gospel, teachers, and friends are pointing to Jesus and saying, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' Are we coming to Him to have our sin taken away—saying

'Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come'?

Let us do this, and not be guilty of the great sin (of which many are guilty) of not **caring** for the Lamb of God, of 'hiding their faces from Him,' and turning away from Him because they don't want Him. That is a heavy sin—the sin of having refused the Lamb of God.

FOR THE TEACHER

It will be difficult, but necessary, to try to get the children to understand that the Jews had learned from the prophets to expect and to hope for One to come who was to set up a new kingdom—'the kingdom of heaven,' or 'of God'; and as kings were anointed, He was called **The Christ**, or **The Messiah**, words which both mean '**The Anointed.**' So many words—The Christ, The Messiah, and The King—are confusing; but the children will come to know them by frequent telling.

VII.—JESUS' BAPTISM, FASTING, AND TEMPTATION

Matt. iv. 1-11; Mark i. 9-13; Luke iv. 1-13

I. **What Jesus got in His Baptism.**—You recollect about the baptism of Jesus, and how John knew then that it was Jesus who was to be King of the new kingdom of heaven. How did John know? By the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove coming down on Jesus. Now I must tell you what good Jesus Himself got by His baptism. It was His anointing, as kings were anointed with oil when they began to reign (1 Sam. xvi. 1; 1 Kings xix. 41). Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit in His heart, and this gave Him power to do the wonderful works of healing, casting out devils, etc., which He afterwards did. 'God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost and with power' (Acts x. 38). At His baptism, too, He got the great comfort of hearing by a voice from heaven that He was the beloved Son of God, in whom God was well pleased. Read this again in Mark i. 9-11. This was a very happy thing for Jesus; but immediately after it came a very painful thing.

II. **Six Weeks of Temptation.**—He was sorely tempted by Satan. What does this mean? It means that Satan tried very much to draw Him into sin. Satan tries to lead everybody into sin; he tempts bad people, but he tempts good people too; he tempts the very best people; he even tempted Jesus. And it is a strange thing that Satan very often tempts good people to sin just after they have been better than usual, perhaps after they have been at church, or after they have been praying to God. And it was after Jesus was baptized that the devil tempted Him very sorely. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He was led into the lonely wilderness, to be tempted there, that the devil might try his worst against Him (read Matt. iv. 1).

He was tempted a long time in that lonely place,—forty days and forty nights,—nearly six weeks, night and day; and all that time He never tasted food. Jesus, I suppose, was thinking so much about the work He had come to do among men, and was praying so earnestly against the temptations of the devil, that He never thought of food. God kept Him alive (read Matt. iv. 2, and explain 'fasted').

III. **The three Final Temptations: 1. The first.**—But the worst was after these forty days were over. Jesus was exceedingly hungry after so long a fast. Hunger like that is terrible to bear. Many a hungry boy in the towns and many a man out of work has been tempted to steal food. When Jesus was so hungry, Satan thought it a good time to tempt Him; so he came to Him and said, 'If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.' There were stones lying about in the wilderness, and Jesus could have turned them into bread. Satan knew that Jesus had received power a short time before, and probably thought Jesus would be in haste to use this new power. Notice too that Satan said, '**If** Thou be the Son of God.' Satan meant that if He did not do this He wasn't the Son of God and couldn't do it. You will notice that Satan did not tempt Jesus to do anything very bad, like stealing,—he knew He

wouldn't,—but to do what there seemed no harm in doing. But Jesus refused. He saw some wrong in it. He would not be trusting His Father in heaven entirely for food if He did this. So He quoted the Bible and said, 'It is written.' We may learn from this that we should wait for God to provide for us, rather than do anything that is in the least wrong (read vv. 2-4).

2. **The second.**—Then the devil took Jesus away from the wilderness (he was allowed to do this somehow) to Jerusalem, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, a place so high as to make one dizzy to look down; and he said to Jesus, 'If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give,' etc. This is really in the Bible (Ps. xci. 11, 12). You see Satan can make a bit of the Bible look as if it was in favour of something he wishes us to do; and many people who have done wrong have fancied that they had texts of Scripture for what they did. It was cunning of Satan to use the Bible in this temptation, after he saw that Jesus was guided by it (v. 4). And see another cunning thing of Satan. He saw that Jesus trusted His Father, and he tried to draw Him too far in that direction—to get Him to make a great show of trust in God by doing a dangerous thing that was not needed at all. But Jesus said, 'It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God' (read vv. 5-7). We may learn from this that we should not put ourselves in danger unless it is needed—unless it is our duty. It is wrong to go into a house with fever or cholera in it unless we are needed. It is wrong to go into bad company and run the risk of sinning with them, unless we **must** go. We may expect God to protect us from evil if we are doing our duty, but not otherwise.

3. **The third.**—Then the devil took Jesus to the top of an exceeding high mountain and showed Him in a moment of time (Luke iv. 3) all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. What a splendid vision! And he said, 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.' That is, the devil would go away from the world, and would let Jesus reign over it, and have everything in it, and make all men good and happy, and would not hinder Jesus from doing the good He came to do. In fact, Jesus would not have to suffer and die, and Satan would let everybody become Christian, if Jesus would only once bow down to him. But Jesus said, 'Get thee behind Me' (read vv. 8-10).

We may learn from this that we should not do evil that good may come of it. We should not try to help a very good thing by even a little wrong thing or wrong word.

IV. **The Issue.**—Then the devil saw he could not get the better of Jesus, and so he left Him for a while. ('**Then the devil leaveth Him**,' v. 11, and Luke iv. 13.) You see it is true, as the Bible says, '**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you**' (Jas. iv. 7).

When the devil had gone away, lo! angels came and waited on Jesus, and gave Him food and comfort (v. 11). **When the devil tempts us to a bad thing and we put it away from us, we have happy feelings after.** God gives us sweet peace in our heart when we resist or flee from a temptation. We know that we have pleased Him, and escaped a great danger. Whenever you are tempted to do wrong, you are in danger; but you will get happiness from God if you overcome the temptation.

To know the Bible early in your life prepares you to overcome the devil and his temptations. See how Jesus defended Himself every time against Satan by a bit of the Bible, and observe that all the three portions were taken from near the first lesson He had learned as a child (Deut. viii. 3 ; vi. 16 ; vi. 13 ; all near Deut. vi. 4. See Lesson V.)

FOR THE TEACHER

Some children may be shown that this temptation comes in between the two parts of the former lesson.

VIII.—WATER TURNED INTO WINE

John ii. 1-11

Introduction.—Jesus brought up at Nazareth. About thirty, left His home to be baptized by John in the Jordan. When He returned and met His mother again (after two months' absence), how much had happened! What news she would hear from the five young men who now followed Him as disciples! Heaven had opened upon Him, He had been 'anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power,' a voice had said, 'Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' and John had pointed Him out to all as the Messiah. How His mother would feel on hearing this! She would remember all about His birth, what the shepherds told, and now her heart would beat high with expectation that her son would do the great things Messiah was to do.

I. **Jesus at a Marriage Feast.**—As soon as Jesus came back, there was a marriage at a place a few miles from Nazareth (Cana). Mary was at it and had some charge (relatives?) (v. 5). Jesus invited, and the five disciples with Him too. He went to it. This was very different from John the Baptist. John was very strict; his life was like a continual fast, not a feast; he never drank wine, and his disciples fasted often (Luke v. 33; vii. 33). Jesus was greater than John, but He went to the marriage feast.

II. **Jesus applied to for Help.**—The wine provided for the feast went done. We need not wonder; for Jesus and His disciples were six guests asked at the last and not counted on. Besides, a marriage feast lasted seven days. It was a great distress to the family that the wine went done. They would be afraid of the shame of it.

The mother of Jesus knew of it, and she thought of Jesus giving help. She had, no doubt, often been helped in their own home by Him, and now—Could He not do *anything*? Could not the Messiah do as much as a prophet like Elisha (2 Kings iv. 1-7), who multiplied oil? Read what she did (v. 3).

It is a very sad thing for a mother when she finds that her son when he grows up is not so kind to her, and not so ready to do her wish, as when he was a boy. But Mary had found Jesus always more and more kind. For thirty years nothing but pleasure from Him. But now Jesus saw that His mother must learn a painful thing—that He had a work to do that she could not guide Him in, and must not. His great work as Prophet and Saviour was beginning, and only His Father in heaven must guide Him in that. This made a separation between His mother and Him, which she must know now, though it would pain her. So He answered—read v. 4. ('*Woman*' was quite kind and loving in their way of speaking; see xix. 26.)

'Mine hour is not yet come' means that in all He did or suffered now, it would be at the time appointed by His Father. But He had not refused, and only said 'not yet,' and Mary had great faith in His goodness and power. Read v. 5.

III. **Jesus gives the Help by a Miracle.**—Outside the house where the feast was going on there had been placed six large stone jars, to be handy for a ceremony which the Jews reckoned part of their religion, viz. to dip their hands in, their brass vessels, or even their things for sitting on (Mark vii. 3, 4). This 'purified' them, *i.e.* made them holy. Strict Jews counted it unholy to eat without such washings. The jars for doing this in were large, of about twenty gallons each. Jesus bade the servants fill these six jars with water. Read v. 7. Now a wonderful thing happened. Before Jesus spoke again the water in the jars had become wine; it was wine, at any rate, by the time it was carried to the guests in the house. Read v. 8. (Explain 'ruler of feast' as one of the people invited who was asked to take the lead at the feast, taste things first, and make everything hearty, which made it easier for the bridegroom, who was giving the feast.) This man tasted the new supply that was brought. He did not know it had once been water. He found it wine so good that he sent for the bridegroom to pay him a compliment, saying, that he was kinder than most people, who gave their best wine first, and then worse when people had been drinking so long that they would hardly notice the taste, etc. Read vv. 9, 10.

Good wine, and what a large quantity Jesus made—six jars of twenty gallons each! But remember the wine was not strong; it cheered but did not easily make drunk, and the people there (as usually in hot countries) were very temperate, and put much water into their wine before drinking it. Jesus, we may be sure, would not have encouraged drunkenness.

IV. **The Effect of the Miracle**.—The five disciples of Jesus were very glad, and believed in Him more firmly. They had found Him gracious, and like His Heavenly Father in conversation. They were glad now to find such *power* as well as *grace* in Him. It made Him seem glorious to them. The glory of Jesus is His grace, and truth and power to help (i. 14). Read v. 11.

LEARN

1. From Jesus going to a marriage feast. *That the religion of Jesus is not gloomy.* He does not frown on innocent happiness. As He went to the marriage feast, we may be sure He would smile on the play of children who play together in love and kindness. We may ask Jesus yet to be with us at our marriage feasts. Christian children may ask Him to be with them at their amusements, and where there is happy laughter. Only if sin mingles would He refuse.

2. From Jesus turning water into wine. *The company of Jesus in our life will make it all as much better as wine is better than water.* That is what Jesus is always doing where He is welcomed,—changing common things into noble and great things. With Him our happy times will be far happier, and our sorrowful times have sweet comfort.

3. From what the ruler of the feast said. (There was more truth in what he said than he knew himself.) *In the world we get the best first, and it grows worse and worse. With Jesus the best is last; life grows better and better.* In the service of Satan, sin promises to be sweet at first; but its pleasures grow less, and it ends in sorrow and woe. In the service

of Christ, sorrow for sin comes first, but then comes the peace which Jesus gives (xiv. 27), and joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope bright even in death.

FOR THE TEACHER

In general, it is better to tell children the drift of what is to be read before making them read it. Usually the divisions and their headings are for the teacher. He will judge in regard to giving them to the scholars. 'Miracles' may be described as wonderful works which mere man could not do; this is the first miracle Jesus did (v. 11).

IX.—JESUS AND NICODEMUS

John iii. 1-21; vii. 50-52; xix. 39, 40

Introduction.—'There is a good time coming.' Often do people cheer themselves up with this hope. Sometimes the whole people of a country have been looking for 'a good time coming,' and hoping to see it and enjoy it. This was the case with the Jews at the time that Jesus was living among them in the Holy Land. Their prophets had told them of a King whom God would give them and who would bring in the good time. It would be under His kingdom and in His reign. So they called the good time they were looking for 'the kingdom of God,' or the 'kingdom of heaven.' (If you turn over the gospels and count how often you find the *kingdom of God* or the *kingdom of heaven* mentioned, you will find it very many times.)

You can understand then the great stir made in their minds when that new and great prophet of God—John the Baptist—appeared, crying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' But when he pointed to Jesus as the King whose way he was sent to prepare, and who was to bring in the good time, they were greatly disappointed. Jesus did not look like one who would gain victories or make them rich, as they fancied the King would do. So they were disappointed in Him, and only a few poor unlearned men were for a while all who believed on Him.

I. **An Anxious Inquirer.**—Now this lesson we have to-day tells of one man, who was rich, and learned, and a ruler (*i.e.* member of chief church court—'Sanhedrin'), who was very much struck by what he saw and heard of Jesus. It made him cast about in his mind whether Jesus might not be the King of the new kingdom. So he came to Jesus to talk with Him. (See what his name was, v. 1; explain 'Pharisees' as chief men in religion, and very strict.)

Nicodemus came to Jesus privately; sought out the house He was staying in, and came after dark. This was that he might not be seen speaking to Jesus. It was rather cowardly of him. He was not a brave man. But when we think of it, it is a wonder he came at all. Jesus was young and poor, and had not long come from Nazareth. Nicodemus was old, and a ruler, and eminent as a teacher (v. 10), and for him to come to Jesus was just as if a professor of divinity in one of our colleges were to come to speak about his soul to a young street preacher. It shows how much Nicodemus had been made to think by what he saw and heard of Jesus. His mind was troubled, and he could not get peace without speaking to Jesus.

When he came, he was *courteous* to Jesus (v. 2, 'Rabbi'—a high title for a young man like Jesus—the title of teachers of the law). He was trying to be *fair* to Jesus too. He would not deny that Jesus had done miracles. But still Jesus was so unlike the King they expected that Nicodemus could not allow He was the King, and tried to explain His miracles by the idea that Jesus was 'a *teacher* sent from God' (read v. 2).

Now what did Jesus answer? Did He say He was a teacher, or more

than a teacher? No; He did not answer about Himself at all, but told Nicodemus something about his own self (read v. 3). You see Jesus meant that Nicodemus too needed to be born again. Why did Jesus answer in this way? Because He saw it was what Nicodemus most needed to know.

Read again what Jesus said (v. 3). (Explain 'see'='share,' as in Acts ii. 27.)

This answer was very surprising to Nicodemus. It shook all his ideas about the kingdom of God, and all his ideas about himself. He had never had any doubt but that if the kingdom of God came he would have a place in it; for he was a Jew—one of God's chosen people. He was a righteous man; a Pharisee, and therefore very strict in obeying the law. He was a member of the chief court of religion—the Sanhedrin. Yet Jesus evidently meant that not he, nor any man, could have a share in the kingdom that was coming without a change in his heart, so great that it was fit to be called a new birth. This made the kingdom of God a very high and holy thing—much more so than what the Jews had been expecting. Nicodemus was staggered, for in his own heart he would feel that a change was needed. But he was not convinced. So he answered Jesus with an argument. Read v. 4. This was not a good argument; for Jesus did not mean that a man's *body* should be born again (and the Jews themselves spoke of a man who, from being a heathen, became a worshipper of God, as new-born).

Jesus answered him again. See how solemnly (v. 5, 'Verily, verily,' etc.) When a holy person like Jesus speaks so solemnly as this it makes much impression. Read all vv. 5-8. Jesus told Nicodemus here a great deal about being born again. The chief thing He told him was that it would happen by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Nobody could see the Spirit of God working in a man's heart to change him and make him good. But that need not surprise us. We do not see the wind; yet we know when it blows by the sound. The Spirit of God is unseen like the wind. It would make a man no better to be born again in the way Nicodemus spoke of (v. 6), but it would make a great difference if his soul were breathed upon by the breath (or 'Spirit') of God.

(v. 9) Nicodemus answered little this time. He was not yet convinced; but Jesus saw that he was greatly impressed. Jesus stopped talking to people when they were not fit to get good by it, and bade His disciples not 'cast their pearls before swine.' But He spoke more to Nicodemus. He told him all this was only at the beginning of divine knowledge. It was one of the 'earthly things' which a man might know to be true from his own heart. There were other things which could only be known by revelation from heaven. Read vv. 10-12. But Jesus gave him a *glimpse* of some of these—for instance, that He Himself had come down from heaven (v. 13). He gave Nicodemus too a prophetic glimpse beforehand of the Cross He was Himself to die on, and how men would get eternal life by looking to Him in faith, as the Israelites had been saved from the bite of poisonous serpents by looking to the serpent of brass. Read vv. 14, 15; see Num. xxi. 6-9.

II. The Inquirer's Decision.—After this meeting with Jesus, what became of Nicodemus? We should like to know what became of the first

ruler who was impressed by Jesus, especially a man to whom Jesus thought fit to tell so much. We should like to know if he drew back or went forward—ever came to follow Jesus.

Turn to vii. 50-52, which tells us something that happened a year or two after this. See the Sanhedrin (explain) sitting; their soldiers coming back to tell them they *could not* take Jesus prisoner. 'Never man spake like this man.' The rulers almost cursed them. One voice mildly spoke for Jesus among themselves. It was Nicodemus's: 'Is it not the law to hear a man and let him speak for himself before condemning him?' But they silenced him with insult.

Once again turn to xix. 39, 40. When Jesus was forsaken by all His disciples; when He hung dead on the cross; when it was a defilement to touch His body; when it was a great danger to appear friendly to a criminal that had been hanged; along with Joseph of Arimathea, who came to bury Jesus, 'there came also Nicodemus.' The spices he brought were costly as for a prince's funeral. See how this man believed in Jesus now! The longer he had thought about His words, and the more he knew of Him, the more he felt that He was worthy, not of a cross, but of all honour; and now love for Jesus drove all his fears away. He would risk anything to show Him honour.

LESSONS

1. Is there a good time coming? Yes; assuredly. It is what we pray for when we say, 'Thy kingdom come.' But we need to be made good to be ready for it. **Our hearts need to be changed and made good.** There is nothing better than to have our hearts made good.

2. Can we make ourselves good? Not without the Holy Spirit. **We should pray God to give us His Holy Spirit in our hearts**, and this will make them clean and good as if we were 'new creatures.'

3. Everybody who knows Jesus only a little is, like Nicodemus, ashamed of Him and afraid to be on His side. But when we trust Him thoroughly, we find it so happy that, like Nicodemus at last, we do not care what danger we are in if we can honour Jesus.

FOR THE TEACHER

John iii. 16-21 is not touched on, as being comment of the Evangelist, and therefore left to the higher grades.

X.—JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

John iv. 1-26, 28-30, 39-42

We are to read to-day of a conversation which Jesus had with a woman who lived in a city of Samaria. First we shall read how this woman and Jesus happened to meet. (It seems to us a mere 'chance'; but it is a happy thing to know that there is no *chance*.)

Jesus was on the way from Judæa to Galilee, and this took Him through Samaria, which lay between. After a long walk in the hot sun His disciples and He stopped near a Samaritan town called Sychar; His disciples went into the town to buy food and left Jesus sitting by a well, which was known to be the very same that Jacob had dug long long before.

(The well is there yet. Many a Christian traveller visits it, reads this chapter as he sits by it, and feels as if he heard Jesus speaking the words we shall read here. The well is now 75 feet deep and 9 feet across. Many years ago it was found 105 feet deep; but people throw in stones to try if there is water, and that is filling it up. Usually the well is dry now, but sometimes a good deal of water is collected in it.)

Jesus was wearied with walking and sat resting, probably on the stone rim of the well (there may have been an arched shelter, as there is now). Does it not show that the Son of God became a man, with a body like ours and feelings like ours, when we read that He sat wearied? He can feel for people who have bodies tired with work. Read vv. 1-6.

While Jesus sat alone a woman came (as we say, 'by chance') with a jar on her head and a rope in her hand to draw water. Now two things are very interesting about the meeting between Jesus and the woman. (1) We see that Jesus, when He found an opportunity of doing this woman good in her soul, did not mind being tired and did not mind trouble. He spoke His best and wisest for her, although she was only **one** person, —a **woman** (the Rabbis thought a woman quite beneath teaching by them), a **Samaritan** (despised by the Jews), and a **sinful** woman. This teaches us that any one soul is very precious to Jesus. (2) This woman came ignorant and sinful; she went away a believer in Jesus—even a missionary to others, and got many more to believe on Him. This shows that it is worth trying to save anybody, as sometimes the most unlikely is saved.

Now we shall read the conversation, and see how Jesus raised this woman from so low to so high. He did it step by step, as He always teaches. This woman learned fast; but we can see the steps.

I. **The Woman's First Step in the Knowledge of Jesus.**—When she came to the well she saw a Jew sitting (she would know this by His dress, etc.) So she would harden her heart against Him proudly, and not show Him any civility, or expect any; for Jews and Samaritans had a bitter quarrel about religion. The Jews thought Jerusalem was the place where people should worship God and say prayers to Him; the Samaritans thought it was a mountain just rising up from this well on the south side (Gerizim). But Jesus spoke—asked a drink of water. He needed it;

for He was tired and thirsty. But it was the best beginning Jesus could have made to do that woman good. People who have been despised and hated are pleased to be asked a kindness; it treats them as friends. The woman was much surprised, but at once she made **one step** in knowledge of Jesus; **she found He was not proud like other Jews, and felt kindly to Samaritans.** Read vv. 7-9.

II. **Her Next Step in the Knowledge of Jesus.**—Read now answer of Jesus (v. 10). 'If you only knew the great gift God is giving the world, and who I am.' 'Living water' meant water flowing fresh from a spring—better than water collected, as in that well. But Jesus meant 'water of life' for the soul, not the body. Where does it flow from? See Rev. xxii. 1. We drink it when we get God's Spirit into our hearts. The woman did not understand, but she felt something about Jesus so gracious and rich she began to wonder and think He might be very great. Read vv. 11, 12. Jesus answered and told her another advantage of the water He would give,—it would satisfy; it would be like a spring going with a man everywhere,—*in him* indeed, and making him live for ever (v. 14). The woman still thought He was speaking of water for the body, but she took now **a step higher** in faith in Jesus. **She believed He could do what He said and give her better than she could get from any well in this world.** It is a great thing when people look up to Jesus for what is best (Ps. lxii. 5). Read v. 15.

III. **A Step Higher in the Knowledge of Jesus.**—Read Jesus' answer (v. 16). Why did He ask this? Perhaps because nobody can get a heavenly gift except they feel sorry for their sins. He said this to let her own heart smite her about the bad way she had been living. Probably she hung her head, and lowered her voice with shame in a good man's presence, when she gave an answer that was not untrue but said as little as possible about her life (v. 17). Read next what Jesus quietly said; for God had showed Him her life (vv. 17, 18). Often people are angry when reminded of their sin and turn away. This woman was raised **a step higher** in her knowledge of Jesus and faith in Him. **She felt sure He was a prophet** (v. 19).

IV. **Her Last Step in the Knowledge of Jesus.**—Immediately she thought she could get the great religious difference of the time settled (v. 20). 'Who is right?' In reply Jesus tells her that God is a Spirit (without body binding Him to one place), and so may be worshipped equally well everywhere; that the one thing He requires is *heart* and *truth* in worship; and that He is a Father who not only allows such people to worship Him but seeks them. Read vv. 21-24. v. 25. ('It is a good thing Messiah will decide everything.') Jesus now put the finish to His teaching of this woman (v. 26). He found her ready to be told this, and she believed it, long before the Jews and learned did. She mounted **this last step. She believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God.**

Recall the steps—(1) **Not proud**; (2) **Great and gracious**; (3) **A prophet**; (4) **The Messiah.**

When she came to Jesus her mind was like a cellar,—dark, foul, and un-

wholesome. Now it was like an upper room, open to the light and air of heaven. It was even like a lighthouse sending out a light to guide men. How do we know? She left her jar (to return soon), and went to bring others to Jesus. She was so earnest she persuaded them (vv. 28-30, 39). See how it happened that her faith spread to still more (vv. 40-42).

LESSONS

1. What God wishes to give is very good to have. Many young people don't like religion because they do not know that it is very happy to have. You have made a step up, if you know this; and you will ask for it.

2. The pleasures of the world satisfy only for a short time. A lady in Paris thought if a palace were hers, it would make her as happy as heaven. She got it and it satisfied her *two days*. Alexander the Great wept that there were no more worlds to conquer. The 'water of life' satisfies evermore.

3. 'Every place is holy ground.' You can pray anywhere, and if you pray 'in spirit and in truth' God will make the place holy with His presence—the church, your fireside, the room you sleep in, the shady wood or the lonely moor.

XI.—JESUS REJECTED AT NAZARETH

Luke iv. 16-30; Mark vi. 1-6

I. **Jesus visits His old Neighbours.**—After Jesus had been preaching a good while, and the fame of His wonderful works had spread far and wide, He paid a visit to Nazareth—that out-of-the-way place among the hills of Galilee where He had been brought up and had lived so many years as a carpenter. He had not begun His ministry here. That would not have been a good place to begin, for people are slow to think anybody great whom they have known living like themselves and beside themselves. That was a true proverb they had then, 'No prophet is accepted *in his own country* or *his own house*.' Jesus knew it to be true, and often quoted it. But sometimes when other people have found out a man's greatness and honoured him, his own people and old neighbours are proud of him and honour him too. So Jesus came now to the town and people He knew so well, and hoped, perhaps, to do them great good, as He had often wished when He lived among them.

II. **He preaches and they wonder.**—On the first Sabbath after He came, He went into the synagogue (or 'church'). It had always been His custom, and this day many would be there to see Him. Do you know what like their Sabbath-day worship was? It was not quite like ours. The principal man in the synagogue was called 'the ruler of the synagogue'; but he did not preach or speak unless he pleased. He chose from among the congregation who should read or speak; and they had not a sermon from a text as we have. They had their Bible (our 'Old Testament') divided into portions for the different days of the year, so that seven portions fell to be read every Sabbath day, and the ruler of the synagogue chose seven different men to read them, and each of them, after reading a portion, might speak a little if he pleased. Any stranger of importance was usually asked to speak (Acts xiii. 15).

They had not all Bibles in their hands as we have now, for they had no printing—only writing—and books were very dear. They would have one set of books belonging to the congregation (rather *rolls*, like our maps) kept in a chest, and there was an officer or servant part of whose duty it was to give the proper roll into the hand of him whom the ruler chose as reader, and to take it back to its place again when he had finished. (This is the 'minister' named here in v. 20; 'minister' means *servant*. The man here called *minister* was not a preacher, but what we would call a *church-officer*.) Now on this Sabbath in Nazareth Jesus was one of those who were called on to read. I suppose the ruler chose Him because they had been hearing so much of what He had done in other places. When the roll was put into Jesus' hands, the place He opened at was Isa. lxi. 1. Read vv. 16-19 (turn to Isa. lxi. 1, and show it the same read by Jesus).

Read v. 20. (Explain that when He sat down after reading they would know He was going to say something; for though they always stood in reading the Bible, they usually sat in public speaking.) Jesus (we may suppose) had gone forward to read at a desk before the people, and when He

sat down there without going back to His old seat they would know He was going to say something, and every eye was fastened on Him. See how He began (v. 21): 'I am the person foretold in these words. They have been lying so long in the Bible waiting for Me.' (When was Jesus 'anointed with the Holy Ghost'? At His baptism (Lesson VII.) What does 'the Messiah' mean, and 'the Christ'? The *Anointed* One.) Read v. 18 again. Was not this a blessed work He was anointed for? Many in that congregation were *poor*; some were *broken-hearted*, for there are sorrowful people in every congregation; and if they had known that they were *all* poor in their souls, captives in chains of sin, and darkened in their hearts, they would have thought Jesus was the very Messiah they needed. But they did not know themselves; and the impression on their minds, though great for a moment, soon passed off. Jesus spoke indeed with such majesty, and His words were so gracious, that they wondered at their old townsman. Read v. 22.

III. **They take offence and try to murder Him.**—But when Jesus had stopped speaking, and they remembered that He had been their carpenter, and that they knew His mother, brothers, and sisters—ordinary people like themselves—they began to be ashamed of minding so much what Jesus had said. Read Mark vi. 3.

Again Jesus began to speak. This time He spoke to their *thoughts*. Jesus often did that, for He saw what people were thinking. He saw now that they wished Him to do some miracles. This would please them. They would not believe in Him without that. They thought they had a right to miracles, if He had done them in other places. So when Jesus began, He spoke like this: 'I know what you would say now. You would bring up to Me a common proverb, "Physician, heal *thyself*."' (Our nearest in meaning is, 'Charity begins at home!') 'You would say to Me, "You are a Nazareth man; do for Nazareth at least what you have done for Capernaum; work as great miracles in your own country." But I will answer you with another proverb, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." It is not there that people have faith in him and he gets a right opening. So in your own Scriptures you will find that of all the widows of Elijah's time, the widow for whom that prophet made her barrel of meal to last over the famine (see 1 Kings xvii. 8-16) was not a widow of his own country, but one of a Gentile country. And of all the lepers of Elisha's time, the only one he cured was also a Gentile (see 2 Kings v.)' Read vv. 23-27. Jesus would very gladly have done mighty works here if He had got an open door of faith. He preached first in gracious words who He was (vv. 18, 19, 21); and next, when these were not believed, He rebuked and warned them. But they were so angry at being disappointed of miracles, at strangers having the preference, and at even Gentiles, whom they counted unclean dogs, being preferred to Jews, that they made a riot in the synagogue, rushed upon Jesus, dragged Him to a precipice of 40 feet high not far off, and were about to throw Him over and kill Him. Read vv. 28, 29. But God protected Him (v. 30).

This is a sad story. We could have wished a different ending to it; that the old neighbours of Jesus had shed tears of joy and pride at seeing Him who had been a boy among them; that they had received Him as the

Messiah, and that many mighty works had been done for their bodies and their souls. But 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not' (John i. 11). They were the hastiest in rejecting Him. A great condemnation came upon Nazareth.

We also may be guilty of rejecting Jesus. We may; and yet I hope we would greatly fear to do so. Let us, therefore, seek to be different from the people of Nazareth in two principal things.

1. They felt no need to be saved from sin. They did not know that they were poor and blind in their souls and needed to be taken out of captivity to sin. They were satisfied with themselves. Let us be humble and glad of a Saviour.

2. They did not value Jesus greatly, because they were so familiar with Him. They had known Him so long, and they would not believe He was the Messiah. Let us take care that we do not think little of the Gospel because we have known it long, or think little of Jesus because His name is familiar. How precious His name is to many people in heathen lands who never heard it till a missionary came to them! How good news they have felt the Gospel! Let us take heed that they do not go into the kingdom of heaven before us, or we be left out altogether.

FOR THE TEACHER

'Save unto Sarepta'—'saving Naaman,' explain as 'except,' etc. Modern proverbs equivalent to that in v. 24 are: 'Familiarity breeds contempt'; 'No man is a hero to his body-servant'; 'Far-away fowls have fair feathers.'

XII.—CURE OF THE PALSY

Matt. ix. 1-8; Mark ii. 1-12; Luke v. 18-26

I. A good Congregation.—For some time Jesus made Capernaum the place from which He made rounds of preaching and to which He came back (Matt. ix. 1, 'His own city'). Once, after a short absence, He was said to be home again, and soon a great crowd filled the house and the yard of the house, and even choked up the passage into the yard ('the door'). The audience was a good one. I do not mean only in *numbers*, but in spirit, in reverence, in readiness to believe. How do we know it was good in this way? (1) Because Jesus 'preached the word' unto them. Sometimes 'He saw great multitudes, and *went away* unto the other side' (Matt. viii. 18). He did so because He saw they were a mob of curious gazers not ready to hear well. But to this audience He preached. (2) Because 'the power of the Lord was with Him to heal' (Luke v. 17). Jesus *could* not do mighty works except among believing people (Mark vi. 6). But the hearers were not all good; there was a mixture. Many Scribes and Pharisees were there from different cities of Galilee, even from Jerusalem, and they were watching to see if they could find fault with Jesus.

II. A Man brought for a Blessing.—While Jesus was preaching, a palsied man was brought by four friends of his. Palsy is a very sad illness. It sometimes makes the whole body helpless; the person cannot walk, cannot even speak so as to be understood. He lies as if he were imprisoned in his body. This man lay on a thick mat, which poor people used for a bed. (Explain that it was not like our beds, but could be rolled up and carried.) His four friends carried him by the corners of the mat. But they could not get near Jesus for the crowd. Did they lose heart? Did they put off and say to the man, 'We've done all we could for you; another time you may have a chance'? Some people are always *putting off*, even the most important things. But these men did not. They managed to get upon the roof of the house from which Jesus was speaking. This was not difficult. In these countries they sleep on the roof, often work on it, and there is often a stair or ladder up to it from the street. But the wonderful thing was what these four men did when they got on the roof. It was not perhaps a strong roof like ours, but it had tiles (Luke v. 19). They broke open the roof, made an opening wide enough, and let down the man through it, on his mat, till he was at Jesus' feet!

III. Jesus gives a greater Blessing.—Jesus was much pleased with what these men had done, because it showed they had great faith in Him, and faith opens the door for Him to do people good. He could not help doing good when people expected it so surely as these people did. But the words He spoke were not what they expected. 'My son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.' Perhaps some one was inclined to say to Jesus, 'You are mistaking; it is a cure that is wanted for this man's body; it is not anything for his soul.' Jesus knew very well what was wanted, but He gave this because it was the greater blessing. Health is a great blessing, but forgiveness is a greater. Sin is the root of all evils, and

it would have been a poor thing for this man to come out of his illness with sin left in his soul. Jesus began at the root in blessing this man, and gave him first the greater blessing. He took the burden of his sins off first, for it was a heavier burden than even his palsy.

IV. **Jesus adds also the Blessing asked.**—But these scribes, etc., who had come to watch Jesus, thought in their hearts that He had sinned Himself and was guilty of blasphemy (explain), for which the punishment was stoning to death. They did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, or had authority from God to forgive sins; so they thought in their hearts that He was sinning greatly in taking upon Him to do what only God can do. Read vv. 6, 7. Besides, they perhaps thought it is easy to *say* Thy sins are forgiven; for it cannot be seen whether they really are. Jesus is just pretending in a thing that cannot be seen. The difficult thing for Him to say would be a word of healing, for then it could be seen whether He had the power. But Jesus read all their thoughts; all hearts are naked and open to Him. He answered their thoughts before they uttered them. He would speak the word of healing, and the result would show whether or not He had heavenly power. If He spoke and it was done in healing palsy, this would show He spoke and it was done in forgiving sin. Read vv. 6-10. What did Jesus say to the sick man (v. 11)? And the man was able to do all this *immediately* (v. 12).

LESSONS

1. We should pray to the Lord Jesus and believe that He has wonderful power to bless us. When we ask a blessing which we wish, He may give us a greater blessing. When we ask a good thing for our body, He may give us good both for our soul and our body too. It is a pity a man should come out of an illness without getting good in his soul too.

2. We should pray to the Lord Jesus for our friends. When a friend is sick we should be like those four who carried the palsied man to Jesus' feet; we should pray as if we were laying our friend there. And we may expect an answer. Whose faith was it that obtained so great good to the man in this story? It was not his own so much as his friends' faith. He could not do anything, or even speak probably. It was his friends who opened the roof and let him down. And it was when Jesus saw *their* faith that He spoke the word of mercy. Should we not do like them when our friends are ill, and often hardly able to pray to Jesus for themselves? And does not this story show that He will hear us, for 'He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.'

FOR THE TEACHER

The verses referred to are those of Mark ii. 1-12, which is to be used in teaching.

XIII.—JESUS' CHOICE OF THE APOSTLES

Luke vi. 12-16

I. **A whole Night of Prayer.**—Read v. 12. It is very interesting to read about Jesus praying. When we read that He *hungered* (in the wilderness, Matt. iv. 2), was *wearied* (at the well, John iv. 6), was *athirst* (on the cross, John xix. 28), we see that He was like ourselves in His body. When we read of Him *praying*, we see that He was like ourselves in His soul—that He had left behind Him in heaven His Divine power, and needed to get help and guidance and comfort from God. And two things in this twelfth verse show that Jesus was *very* like us. (*a*) He could pray best when He was alone. 'He went out into the mountain,' because it was so quiet and lonely. (*b*) And He found it good to pray long when He had something important or anxious on His mind. He had that now, so He prayed a whole night (see also Luke ix. 28, 31).

II. **An important Thing to be done.**—What had Jesus now on His mind? It was this: the time was come when He must choose men to give up their earthly business and be much with Him. He needed them to help Him, because He could only be in one place, and there was much preaching and healing to be done (Matt. ix. 36, etc.) They must be much with Him that they might learn from Him, and so be fit to teach others, and be ready when He had gone to heaven to go out as missionaries to the world. This is why they came to be called *Apostles*. That word means *men sent out*. What now would Jesus be praying about in that night of prayer? Would it not be that He might choose the fittest men, or the men His Father gave Him (John xvii. 6) and willed Him to choose, and that God would bless them for their work, and make their company a comfort to Jesus?

III. **Twelve chosen to be Apostles.**—By daybreak Jesus was ready and began.

First he called His disciples. Disciples are *learners*. Every man or woman, or even child, who comes to Jesus to learn what to believe, and how to live, is a disciple of His. Jesus had by this time many disciples, and it was from among them He chose twelve to be Apostles; for men are not fit to be trained for preachers or missionaries unless they are disciples. Read v. 13. In the next verses the names of the twelve are given (read vv. 14, 15, 16), and we see that seven of them had been called before this to go with Jesus, and had left their business to do it. These were Peter and Andrew (two brothers), James and John (other two brothers), who were all fishermen and at their work on the Lake of Galilee when Jesus called them (Matt. iv. 18-22); Philip and Bartholomew (who was also called Nathanael) had been called before too (John i. 43-51). Matthew, a tax-gatherer (also named Levi), had been called by Jesus when he was sitting at his counter collecting taxes, and he at once left all and followed Jesus (Luke v. 27, 28). Jesus now made up the number to twelve.

Look at the list and see who is named first. *Peter*. He was usually the

leader and spokesman. Who is named last? *Judas Iscariot.* It was he who betrayed Jesus. There were three of them whom Jesus took with Him on some great and solemn occasions when He did not take the rest,—the raising to life of the daughter of Jairus (Mark v. 37); when He went up into a mountain and was 'transfigured' (Luke ix. 28); when He was in agony in the garden (Mark xiv. 33). The three who had this honour, whose company Jesus wished at the most solemn times (Matt. xxvi. 40), were *Peter*, *James*, and *John*. These three were the chief of the Apostles, 'the chosen of the chosen.' One of them had a still greater honour,—he was the particular *friend* of Jesus. Jesus liked to have him next Him at the table; he 'reclined in Jesus' bosom.' He is called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Jesus loved them all, but *John* was His dear friend. Who kept the money-box? They had but one purse for the whole company; Judas Iscariot was trusted with it, and it was he mostly who bought things that they needed, or gave out of the box what was to be given to the poor (John xii. 6; xiii. 29).

IV. **What kind of Men they were.**—Were the Apostles *good* men, and was that the reason why Jesus chose them? They were, to begin with, men with faults like others. But they all had this good, that they felt drawn to Jesus in their hearts, they believed in Him and loved Him more and more, and by His Holy Spirit they became very good and holy and wise—all except *Judas Iscariot.* Even he, perhaps, had some good in him at first, but he began to steal from the money-box, and grew worse and worse.

Were the Apostles *learned* men, and was that the reason Jesus chose them? No; they were not like 'college-bred' men, but they were not like very ignorant people either. Even working men among the Jews at that time got a good plain education. The Apostles could read and write in both the languages spoken then in the Holy Land. They could also read the Bible (our Old Testament) in the old Hebrew; and they knew the Bible exceedingly well, and were much accustomed to discussions about religion even before they became disciples of Jesus.

Were they very clever men,—men of *talent* or even of *genius*, as we say of our greatest men? One of them was such a man—John. He was one of the greatest men for deep thought that have ever lived. Another of them, perhaps, was a great man by nature—Peter. He was great in action; he was fit to be a leader, because he was very quick to feel what was good, and very ready to do it, and very hopeful. The rest of them were probably as different from one another as John was from Peter. One of them, we know—Thomas—was very loving, but despondent (John xi. 16; xx. 25). Philip was simple and unprejudiced, but slow to learn (John i., vi., xiv.) Simon the Zealot was hotly patriotic. But none of them were great. Yet all the twelve were given to Jesus by His Father (John xvii. 11, 12). Jesus told them secrets about God and heaven as they were able to take them in (Mark iv. 34; John xvi. 12); He gave them power to heal diseases (Matt. x. 1); He spent much time in training them; He promised that they should sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. xix. 28); and He loved them to the end (John xiii. 1).

V. **What became of them.**—Would you like to know something of what became of them? The first to die was Judas; he hanged himself in despair after betraying his Master. The first to be a martyr was James, the brother of John. It happened soon after Jesus was gone into heaven (Acts xii.) So James had but a short career, and was soon taken from the Church, though he was one of the greatest of the Apostles. His brother John, on the other hand, lived longest of all; he was the last on earth who had known Jesus among men. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us much about Peter, and much about Paul, who was added to the twelve; but about most of the Apostles hardly anything. Most of them seem to have been little known, and to have been soon forgotten by men. But Jesus will keep that great promise to them (Matt. xix. 28), and what do we read of them in the vision of the New Jerusalem that is to come down out of heaven from God (Rev. xxi. 14)?

LESSONS

1. We should pray much, as Jesus did, when we have an important choice to make. If He needed to pray about it and to get guidance from God, much more do we.

2. Jesus is helped in His work by men. He is doing His great work in the world still, and He does it mostly by calling His disciples, teaching them how to do it, and giving them power. Some who are very strong and clever can give much help. But we can give help though we are not clever. Every kind of man can give help, as we see Jesus chose twelve men who were very different from one another, and who had different turns and temperaments, to make up the help He needed. He made them fit by giving them His Holy Spirit, and He gives us the same Spirit if we ask Him.

3. People who are not much known in the world and soon forgotten among men, may be great in the kingdom of heaven. They may be living much with Jesus, and may have high honour from Him though the world does not hear of them. So it was with most of the twelve Apostles.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

XIV.—THE BEATITUDES

Matt. v. 1-12

I. **The Place.**—Jesus sometimes preached in synagogues, sometimes in the open air. To-day we are to read from a sermon which He preached on a mountain. That is why it is called **the Sermon on the Mount.** Would not a mountain be a very suitable place for a sermon on a quiet day? Look at the top of a hill where it meets the sky,—how peaceful and solemn it looks, especially in the morning or in the evening! It would be away from the noise of the town, and, besides, the people could sit below Jesus and all look up to Him. Jesus sat too; He did not stand, as a minister does now; He *sat*, and He spoke very solemnly.

II. **The Hearers.**—Multitudes of people were there, a few of them disciples (explain from Lesson XIII.) of Jesus, who perhaps came close round Him; most of them not disciples. Read v. 1. All had a thing in their mind on which they expected Him to speak,—'the good time coming,' or, as it was called by them, 'the kingdom of heaven' (see Lesson IX.) John the Baptist had been preaching, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Jesus had preached this too; so the talk with everybody was, Could He be the king that was to bring in that good time? Perhaps they expected He would tell this Himself; anyhow He might speak of the kingdom, and there was nothing they liked better to hear about. They liked to read the old prophecies about it; but they had added to them a great many fancies of their own that were not true, and they needed much to be told the real truth about it. Read v. 2. It was a long sermon Jesus spoke to them on that mountain,—longer at any rate than He usually spoke. It takes up three chapters of St. Matthew's gospel—the fifth, sixth, and seventh. It was a very beautiful sermon. What kind of beauty had it? The beauty of holiness; and we shall see its beauty more and like it better the holier we grow.

III. **The Beginning—The Eight Beatitudes.**—To-day we shall see how the sermon began. First when He opened His mouth to these hearers, Jesus spoke eight sentences all beginning with the same word—*blessed*, which means *happy*, *fortunate*, or just '*well off*.' Eight times He began with 'blessed'; so these sentences are called by a word (from the Latin) which you will sometimes hear ministers use, *Beatitudes*, *i.e. Blessednesses.* He told His hearers eight kinds of people that were blessed, or well off; and what He said was a great surprise to those who heard Him. They thought that it was rich people who were blessed, and great people, and clever people, and people that got much pleasure. But Jesus did not say that these people were well off at all; in all His eight sentences He did not mention them. See who are the first He called blessed (v. 3)—*the poor in spirit.* That means the people who have a humble opinion of themselves in God's sight, who are not satisfied with themselves, but feel they should be much

better than they are. The hearers of Jesus thought it was well to be like their Rabbis and Pharisees, who thought highly of themselves.

The next whom Jesus called blessed were (v. 4) *they that mourn.* That would surprise His hearers even more, and Jesus intended to surprise them and make them think; for they were quite mistaken about trouble and sorrow. They thought that when people had to mourn it showed God was angry with them. But Jesus had a different opinion about trouble and sorrow, and He said, 'Blessed are they,' etc.

The next whom Jesus called blessed were (v. 5) *the meek.* This also would surprise His hearers very much. They thought it was well to be able to pay back injuries or affronts, to be able to hold the head high, even to take by force and 'divide the spoil with the proud.' Jesus said it was well to be *meek*—that is, to bear injuries well, and take affronts patiently, and to be good at yielding. These three beatitudes would seem to the hearers quite contrary to the truth. The next four would seem to them perhaps not so very untrue, but still they were not the kinds of people *they* would have called blessed. It would seem strange that He chose such as these for that word. (v. 6) *That hunger and thirst after righteousness*—that is, who have a very great desire to be good, as a hungry man desires food or a thirsty man drink. (v. 7) *The merciful*—who are not cruel, and do not love to blame hardly or punish hardly. (v. 8) *The pure in heart*—whose heart is clean from any bad purpose. (v. 9) *The peacemakers*—who help to make people friends who have been quarrelling, or who help to make people friends with God who have been sinning against Him.

Still there was one more beatitude which would again seem to the hearers of Jesus quite untrue (v. 10)—*the persecuted for righteousness' sake.* How could it be well to be persecuted, they would say; so Jesus repeated this one over again in different words. To His disciples near Him He particularly said, it would be well for them when they were persecuted and ill-spoken of for His sake. They were never to think themselves more happy than when this happened to them. Read in vv. 10, 11, 12. (Nine verses begin with *blessed*, but there are only eight beatitudes—eight kinds of people whom Jesus calls blessed.)

IV. **The Reasons why.**—Now you will also observe that every time Jesus named people who were blessed, He told the reason why, and some of His reasons would surprise His hearers as much as His beatitudes. Look again at the first and the last (vv. 3, 10). The reason why is, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The people thought that the way into the kingdom of heaven was by circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. Jesus said nothing about these things. The *poor in spirit* and the *persecuted for righteousness' sake*, theirs, He said, is the 'good time coming' that everybody is speaking of; it is begun in them already, and they will share in the full glory of it. The multitudes had expected Jesus to speak about the kingdom of heaven, but this was, they would think, a strange way of speaking. His thoughts about it and theirs were very different.

Look also at 'the reason why' of some of the other beatitudes—the *second* (v. 4). That is to say, there is comfort for all that mourn if they only knew of it, and it is a rule of the kingdom of heaven that everybody in it shall be comforted. The *third* (v. 5). 'What!' the hearers would

say, 'the strong and violent rather shall inherit the earth. The old Israelites, our fathers, got the land by the sword.' Jesus says the new Israelites are to get it by meekness. He is right. Patience is the strongest thing. Gentleness and contentment make people feel rich, as if the world were theirs. [A lady had spine disease for twenty years, but she was comforted and contented, and took such pleasure in things which she saw or which her friends had, that her brother, who was a great man—Dr. Arnold of Rugby—said he never knew anybody who so inherited the earth as she did.]

The other reasons are all good reasons. That, for example, in v. 6: if people greatly wish to be good, they will get their wish. The world is full of wishes, and very often they are disappointed; but that wish will not be disappointed. That in v. 8: the eyes by which we see God are the eyes of the heart. The heart has eyes or windows which sin fouls and darkens; but when the sin is put *away*, people begin to know God, and they will see Him by and by 'face to face.'

Now you have learned a little about the beatitudes. It is not possible to tell you all about them; that would need many books, because they are true in so many ways. They are beautiful as well as true. Try to remember them, and the longer you think of them the more you may see that they are beautiful; and the longer you live in the world, the oftener you may find them come true even in it. In the kingdom of heaven, when it is completely set up, their truth will shine as the light.

LESSONS

1. We should make sure that we really believe what Jesus tells us here about who are well off. It surprised the people who heard Him, and very few people yet really believe it. You will often hear people say, how well off some person is to be so rich, or so clever, or so healthy, or to have so many pleasures; but seldom will you hear people say how well off a person is to be so humble and meek, or who is persecuted for righteousness' sake. And if any one were to say that such a person is more to be admired and envied than a person with a great estate or a fine house, it would be thought foolish talk by many people. A man who would rather wish to be pure in heart than to have a million pounds would be thought nearly mad by some. But we believe in Jesus, do we not? and He tells us the truth, which is a secret from the men of the world. Let us make sure we believe as He tells us.

2. Let us try ourselves to be the kind of people described by Jesus in the beatitudes. It is well if we try to be like the people in any one of them. [Name some.] It will need that we try very earnestly, for often our own hearts will not be inclined to it. The best way to have any of these blessings of Jesus is to ask the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts. He will show us how good and beautiful it is to be what Jesus praised; and if we desire this blessedness we shall get it.

FOR THE TEACHER

As the verses in this lesson are dealt with usually one half at a time, the teacher should read the portions himself, asking a child to read after him.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

XV.—THE LORD'S PRAYER—FIRST PART

Matt. vi. 9, 10

I. **A good Gift of the Lord Jesus.**—Our lesson to-day is about the Lord's Prayer. We shall take one half of it to-day and the rest next Sunday. Do you know why it is called 'the Lord's Prayer'? It is because the Lord Jesus taught it to His disciples. We find it here in the Sermon on the Mount, and He says to us, 'After this manner pray ye.' Is it not a great kindness of the Lord Jesus to give us this prayer? It is a very solemn thing to go to God and speak to Him in prayer; our hearts might fail us and our tongue might fail us. We might be unable to speak from fear and from not knowing anything good enough to say. But when He gives us this prayer, it is as if Jesus took us by the hand and led us into the presence of God, and taught us how to behave in that holy place, and put words into our mouth which we may always be sure are fit to be spoken to God. Now would it not be very wrong and a great loss to ourselves if we neglected this prayer which Jesus has given us, and did not use it? Satan tempts people to do that, and often they are drawn into this sin for a long time. I hope you children will not be like them, and will try to learn well to-day how to use it.

Three things are needed in order to use the Lord's Prayer well:—

1. **A right memory of it.**—Can you say the Lord's Prayer? Can you say it *correctly*? It makes us sorry when we find young people who cannot say it, or who blunder in it, going wrong again and again at the same places; for this shows they do not pray it, or pray in a hurry, and make nonsense of what they say to God! We would like you to be able to say the Lord's Prayer *correctly* and *easily*, so that you can say it slowly, and stop to think a while after any bit of it you have said. [Let the teacher test the children; get them to read it slowly and correctly if they have got into faults; appoint it to be said well by every one next Sunday.]

2. **A right understanding of it.**—We should pray with our understanding (1 Cor. xiv. 15). To babble words in a language we don't understand, or to babble words in our own language without thinking or without caring what they mean,—does this please God? No! See then that you understand the first three petitions (or *askings*) in the Lord's Prayer, 'Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.' A child may understand them a little; but it needs an old Christian to understand them well. Is it not wonderful that Jesus gave a prayer which is not too difficult for children, and yet has room in it for the wisest Christian and for all his mind?

(*a*) When a child says, 'Hallowed be Thy name,' he asks that God's name may never be spoken in a profane way, as is done by men who swear, and that all men everywhere may have deep awe and reverence in their hearts about God, and about everything that tells about God. Some good men used to make a little pause after mentioning God's name, just for

reverence. We need not do that; but it would be a good thing if we and all men *felt* like that, and had great reverence for the Bible and everything that helps us to know God—for all that is *His name.* This is what we ask for when we pray, 'Hallowed be Thy name.'

(*b*) When we say, 'Thy kingdom come,' we are praying for 'the good time coming,' which good men have always hoped for and God's prophets foretold, and which Jesus began in the hearts of His disciples. It has begun in all good people's hearts, and in the Church of Christ, and in some parts of the world it has made progress. Everybody who is trying to put what is bad out of the world and to put good in its place is helping on the kingdom of God; and it is a good help to pray (as we do in these words) that the progress of the kingdom may be hastened in ourselves and in every human soul—in our parish, our city, our country, and all the world—till its perfection and glory is reached, when Jesus comes again to reign. So this part of the Lord's Prayer is a missionary part. We pray here for the work missionaries are doing by preaching the Gospel in all the world, and for the work ministers and Sunday School teachers and good fathers and mothers are doing at home.

(*c*) 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.' How is the will of God done in heaven? Perfectly, willingly, joyfully. It is the pleasure of every one in heaven to do God's will. Is not this then a happy prayer? for what a happy world would this be if God's will were done in earth as it is in heaven,—if no one on earth did any wrong, and all did God's will perfectly, willingly, joyfully! Is not this worth asking for? Are we not glad we can help it on by praying for it? And is it not a happy thing that it will be some day? for Jesus would not have bid us pray this if it were not a prayer that God will hear.

3. **A right heart.**—Much the most important thing, if we would make a right use of the Lord's Prayer, is a *right heart.* God looks at the heart. Words are of no use without a right heart; but a right heart in our prayers is greatly pleasing to God, and always wins an answer and a blessing from Him. Now what kind of heart is the right one? The very beginning of the Lord's Prayer teaches us this,—'Our Father which art in heaven.' So it begins, and from this we see that our heart should feel to God as a child's heart feels to his father. Our heart is right when it *warms to Him* in love as we say 'Father,' and also *feels deep reverence* for Him, because He is far higher than an earthly father—He is a heavenly Father. [I have heard of a gentleman who showed his friend a little piece of crumpled paper and said, 'No money would buy that from me.' His little girl had died, and this was found in her play-room with 'Dear Papa' written on it in the handwriting of a child. It pleased her father so much to find that she loved him and liked to write this at her playtime, that he would not part with it for anything.] Now God is a Father, more loving than any earthly father, and it pleases Him very greatly when our heart warms to Him and we say, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' This is worship which God loves to get, even though we say nothing more. [I have also heard of a lady telling that when her children were young and she heard one of them cry 'Mother,' though she was at the top of a high house and the child was downstairs at the bottom, the cry went to her heart, and she could not but hasten to find what was wanted.] So if we cry 'Father' to God it goes to His heart, and He is in-

clined to give what we ask. Recall the three things—a right **memory** of the prayer, a right **understanding** of it, a right **heart**.

II. **A still better Gift of the Lord Jesus.**—Now I go on to tell you of a thing which the Lord Jesus does for us which is even better than His giving us this prayer to guide us when we go into God's holy presence and make us sure that we are using words fit for God. *He gives us also the right heart.* That is far more necessary than right words, and often we do not have it, and feel the words too good for us to use. Even very good men often feel that. [When John Knox was dying he read over the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, 'Our Father,' etc.; then he stopped and said, 'Who is worthy to utter so holy words?'] We are not worthy, and sometimes we have no heart or inclination to say them, because our heart is not right with God. But Jesus gives us the right heart; He is God's well-beloved Son; He always feels as a son to God; and since He has become our Brother and died for us, He can give us something of His own heart and feeling toward His Father and our Father. How? By giving us His Holy Spirit. This is a very wonderful and precious gift, because it warms our heart to God, and makes it full of love and reverence for Him. The Holy Spirit drives out what is bad in our hearts and makes us feel it happy to come to God 'as children to a father, able and ready to help us.' So the Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of adoption (sonship), whereby we cry, Abba, Father!' (that is, Father, dear Father!) (Rom. viii. 15). That is a cry that goes to the heart of God, whether it comes from a child or from a grown man. Remember that the chief thing in a prayer—the thing that makes it go up with acceptance to God in heaven—is a right heart; and a child may get this from Jesus as well as a grown man.

Now you have learned a little about how to pray. Nothing is more important to learn; for the greatest things perhaps in the world are done by prayer. You can learn it now while you are children, and how glad you will be you have learned it if ever you are in sickness, or in trouble, or in danger, or when you die! Don't be in a hurry with your prayers; don't mind so much about the words; but oh! see that you have the right heart. If you are not sure you have it, ask the Lord Jesus to give it you, and then begin your prayer. When you pray, you are like coming to a door above which is written, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' It opens quickly, and a rich answer is given when you say, with your heart in the words, 'Our Father which art in heaven.'

FOR THE TEACHER

With reference to (1) of Section I., it would be a great help to intelligent and reverent saying of the Lord's Prayer if the teachers would ask the children to repeat the petitions after them, with proper expression and emphasis.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

XVI.—THE LORD'S PRAYER—SECOND PART

Matt. vi. 11-15

Introduction.—To-day another lesson in the Lord's Prayer, to make you good at using it. [Test whether the children can repeat it correctly and easily, and recall points from former lesson.]

Now we come to three petitions very easy to understand, 'Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' Perhaps you wonder that this second half of the Lord's Prayer did not come first: that before we ask even for our bread, which we cannot live without, our Lord teaches us to ask three times for the glory of God. 'Hallowed be *Thy* name. *Thy* kingdom come. *Thy* will be done.' Perhaps you say that the Lord's Prayer is only for very good people, who are more anxious for these things than they are to have even food and clothing or to have their sins forgiven. Well, the Lord's Prayer is good enough for the best people, but it is not too good for you children if you have the right heart to God when you call Him 'Father in heaven.' When you grow older and have a house of your own, and your father (I mean your earthly father) visits you, you will be more anxious to honour and delight him than to get your own things to go right. So when your heart is full of a child's love to your heavenly Father, it will be natural for you to ask at once, 'Hallowed be Thy name,' etc. The Lord's Prayer has been likened to a ladder between heaven and earth, and when you begin it you are already at the top of the ladder; you are very near to God when you say 'Our Father'; and it is natural in coming down that the first steps should be these high-up ones.

I. **Give us this Day our Daily Bread.**—Remember well that it is God who gives us our bread every day—and this word *bread* here includes our clothing and the shelter of our houses—all that we mean when we speak of a man 'earning his bread.' When Elijah was at the brook Cherith the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening. God was not seen; but it was He who thus fed Elijah. Our food is also from God. He makes the corn to grow, and the food we use which comes from distant countries. God keeps your parents and friends in health, and able to work for money to buy bread with. He puts the love for you into their hearts, which makes them glad to get things for you. If it were not for God, they might be disabled by illness, or you might be too ill to take food. So we should all pray this prayer—(1) when we are poor and scarce of food. Often when the father of a family has been laid down with sickness, or has been long out of work, and food for the children was scanty, how earnestly all have asked, 'Give us,' etc.! How glad they have been to think that daily bread is from God, and that we have a right from the Lord Jesus to come and say this to God! And often God answers this prayer wonderfully. We should pray it daily—(2), also when we have plenty. In this way we acknowledge God to be

the giver of our food, and we take it as if from His hands, and so our daily bread seems holier and more happy to get, for it is a token to us every day that our Father in heaven is thinking and caring for us. Often we may stop a little after saying this bit of the Lord's Prayer to thank God in our hearts for the food we have, and for many comfortable things besides.

II. **Forgive us our Debts.**—This is a very precious bit of the Lord's Prayer, for two reasons. (1) It is a most happy thing that sin can be forgiven. How awful it would be if after doing something wrong we never could get rid of the burden of it—if once done, it could never be undone! It is very wonderful that when there is a spot on our soul from a lie, or a bad thought, or a sin done long ago, God can make our soul clean. No hand but God's can wipe away the sin, but His can. He can put it away by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John i. 7; Isa. xliii. 25). (2) It is a most happy thing that we can come and ask God to forgive us, that though it is God we have sinned against, Jesus gives us these words to say to Him, *Forgive us our debts*, and if we speak the words Jesus has given us with true hearts, they will be heard. But observe what follows—which will test whether we have a true heart and are really sorry for our sins—'**as we forgive our debtors**' (or, as in Revised Version, 'as we also have forgiven our debtors'). See also what Jesus added in vv. 14, 15 (read). Why is it that God does not forgive us unless we forgive people whom we have a quarrel with? Because if we don't forgive them it shows we have not a right heart about our sins, nor a true sense of their badness. If we are truly sorry for our sins against God we shall feel that they are much worse than any wrong that people have done to us (see Matt. xviii. 24, 28, 35); and we shall have no desire to deal hardly with them when we need so great a forgiveness ourselves. [A baron in old times was going out to fight in great rage against a neighbouring baron. His chaplain entreated him not to do it, and when he would not yield proposed that he and his men should at least pray before setting out. The chaplain spoke this bit of the prayer very slowly and solemnly, 'Forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our debtors*.' The baron felt that this would be a curse on himself if he did not forgive; so he gave up his anger and his expedition.]

You children would do well to use this bit of the Lord's Prayer well *at the end of each day*. You might stop after saying it, look back on the day, and try to mind any word or act that was not pleasing to God. [One day a little boy quarrelled with his little brother. When he went to bed at night he was very unhappy about it. At length he jumped out of his bed in the dark and prayed God to forgive him this debt, that he had been unkind to his little brother. When he grew up he became a most holy man (Fletcher of Madeley), and he said, 'That night, when I went to bed again, was the first time I ever felt the peace of God in my heart.'] (Read v. 2 of Hymn 285 and explain it with this.)

III. **Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.**—*Temptation* to sin is a very serious thing. It is like the great current that is flowing fast towards a mighty waterfall; it is dangerous to go into it, for it may draw us down to death. So many a child, or young man, has been drawn into sin by bad company, or by bad opportunity, or by something that made it hard to do right and pleasant to do wrong. 'And sin, when it is

finished, bringeth forth death' (Jas. i. 15). Nothing will be a surer sign of wisdom in a young person than to pray this prayer earnestly, and be sincere about it, avoiding temptation whenever possible. God can wonderfully take temptations out of our way, and help us to overcome them if we must meet them. We would advise you children to stop a little while after this bit of the Lord's Prayer *in the morning*. Think of the places you are likely to be in during the day—the school, the playground, etc.—remember what has been a temptation to you before, and then pray this prayer about it. If you have spoken to God about a temptation before it comes (about a temptation to cheat, or lie, or be idle, or bad tempered), you will either find it taken away or you will be made stronger against it.

Intercession.—Perhaps you have wondered that in this model prayer which Jesus gives us there should not be any prayer for other people. You would like to pray for your father, mother, brothers, friends, and they would like you to pray for them. But see! this prayer is, we may say, all for other people along with yourself. The little words *our* and *us* and *we* take them in. When you wish to pray for any of your friends, you can think of them when you say these words, or you can name them, and say what you wish God to do for them; and God often hears such a prayer from a child.

Praise.—After six 'petitions'—three for God and three for ourselves; five for spiritual things and one for temporal—comes the conclusion in which we *comfort ourselves* and *praise God*, saying, '**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**' How does this *comfort* us? Because after asking from God, we are glad that all the power is His. How does it *praise* Him? Because we declare His eternal greatness. *Amen* means 'so be it,' 'so let it be.' It just sums up in one word all we have said; and it is most useful when one person has spoken the prayer and another wishes to say that he joins in it. Then he has just to say at the end, *Amen!*

The chief thing.—It has been said that in the beginning of the Lord's Prayer you pray as a *child*, in the first petition as a *worshipper*, in the next as a *subject*, then as a *servant*, then as a *beggar*, then as a *sinner*. But no; it is better to pray all through as a child—as if 'Father' came before each bit of the prayer. 'Father, Thy will be done'; 'Father, give us this day.' The chief thing in a prayer is to have the right heart, that, viz., of a child.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

XVII.—THE RELIGION OF THE HEART

Matt. vi. 1-8, 16-18

Introduction.—Again a lesson from the Sermon on the Mount That sermon was listened to by 'multitudes' besides Jesus' own disciples. Now were they people who neglected religion? This is a great evil nowadays, that many people never or seldom come to church, do not pray, do not give money to help the work of God, and take no trouble about religion. But the people to whom Jesus was speaking had great interest in religion, went every Sabbath to the synagogue, on Mondays and Thursdays also, and yearly went great distances to the feast of the Passover at Jerusalem. They learned their Bible carefully, gave tithes (tenth parts) of all their goods to religion. Some of their chief people (Scribes and Pharisees) were most strict in good works—paid tithes even of mint, anise, and cumin (garden herbs), fasted twice a week (that is, went without food as an act of religion), and would not have walked more than a Sabbath-day's journey (a little over a mile) on the Sabbath on any account. It must therefore have surprised His hearers very much when Jesus said (chap. v. 20), '*Except your righteousness shall* EXCEED *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.*' 'What!' they would say; 'that is not possible. How very hard a kingdom that must be to get into!' What did Jesus mean? He meant that their religion must be *in the heart.* The Scribes and Pharisees, if the law was kept outwardly, did not think much about the heart. The Sermon on the Mount is greatly taken up with telling that the heart is the principal thing—that if the thoughts and motives are not right, the outward conduct is of no value.

Now in the verses that are for our lesson to-day (vi. 1-18) Jesus tells of one way in which the heart very often goes wrong, viz. if people do righteous acts with this motive in their heart—*to be seen of men* and *praised*, or *thought good.* Jesus was very anxious that His disciples should not fall into this, so He says (v. 1), 'Take heed that ye do not your righteousness (Revised Version) before men, to be seen of them.' (This does not contradict chap. v. 16; a world of difference between letting good works be seen for the glory of our Father in heaven and for our own glory.) Jesus gives a reason (v. 1). He tells of a great loss we shall suffer if we do this —we shall lose the reward which our Father in heaven will give for everything done to please Him (for even a cup of cold water given in the name of Christ shall in no wise lose its reward, x. 42). This first verse is, as it were, the *text* of what Jesus says here, and He treats it under *three heads*; He fixes what He said in the minds of His disciples by applying it to three kinds of righteousness—**almsgiving**, **prayer**, and **fasting.**

I. **Almsgiving** (giving to the poor).—Jesus teaches about this by example. That is the most easily understood kind of teaching. Often a good example does us great good. But Jesus here uses an example of what was bad, and warns His disciples not to do like it. He describes what the hypocrites did. (Hypocrites are people who put on a show of religion, but

their religion is not true and real.) He says they sounded a trumpet before them in the synagogues. This does not mean that they actually blew a blast of sound from an actual trumpet when they gave money to the poor, but they did all they could to have their alms noticed and spoken of in the streets and in the synagogues; perhaps spoke of their alms themselves, behaved like people now who (as we also say) 'trumpet' their good deeds—are 'their own trumpeters'—that they might have glory of men. Observe the solemn thing Jesus says about these hypocrites: 'Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.' Do you think that *not* solemn? Do you wonder He should say they get a reward for this behaviour? But see what He means. They have got their reward and there is no more to get. They have got some praise of men, but there is no reward to be got from God. In the world where God is they have *nothing*. Jesus tells this solemnly ('Verily I say'), because it was so sad to be praised by men and have no reward with God. He advises His disciples to do exactly the opposite of these hypocrites. Read v. 3. This is of course impossible *literally*; but you see it just means to avoid show as much as possible, to lose willingly the praise of men, and so make sure of pleasing our Father in heaven. He sees in secret; He never overlooks a good thing; a reward from Him is certain, and worth infinitely more than men's praise (v. 4).

II. **Prayer.**—Jesus teaches again by example, and again by bad example. He describes a bad example, and uses it like a light that is placed on a rock to warn voyagers away from danger. It is again the example of the hypocrites of that time and country. They chose to say their prayers in the synagogues even on week-days; they went there to be seen of men. They would also arrange their going out of doors so that the hour of prayer might find them in the street, at some corner perhaps, and then they said their prayers there to get the praise of being holy from people passing. How solemnly Jesus says of them also, 'Verily I say unto you, they have their reward'! They get this praise but nothing more by their prayers. What a miserable thing is a prayer which men praise but God does not hear—is, indeed, greatly displeased with! Again Jesus directs His disciples to do exactly opposite from this bad example (v. 6). (Closet = inner chamber.)

Jesus speaks also here in passing of another way in which prayer might fail to get anything from God, viz. if it was made up of 'vain repetitions.' When we are very anxious about something we may pray often about it. St. Paul prayed thrice about his thorn in the flesh that it might be taken away (2 Cor. xii. 8). Jesus Himself prayed thrice in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'saying the same words' (Mark xiv. 39). These were not 'vain repetitions.' But when heathens think that God is persuaded by the great number of times they 'blatter' over sacred words, they are very foolish. Buddhists think there is great power in repeating these words of which nobody understands the meaning, 'Om mane pad me Om.' The priests of Baal cried from morning till noon, 'O Baal, hear us' (1 Kings xviii. 26). Hindoos and Mohammedans also repeat the same words a multitude of times; and Roman Catholics fall into the same error when they think it a merit with God to say the Lord's Prayer a great many times, using a string of beads to count with. Luther said the Lord's Prayer was one of the greatest martyrs from the way in which it was abused; and Protestant children often abuse it

too by saying it fast and without thinking. Jesus shows how foolish these vain repetitions are (v. 8), 'Your father knoweth what things,' etc. All who wish to pray will find that it helps them much to remember this. This makes it easy to pray; even if we cannot tell out all our needs, we can come to the feet of our Heavenly Father and feel comforted that He knows our case, though we have told it only once and very poorly.

III. **Fasting.**—When people wished to give a time to sorrow for their sins and to pray very earnestly, they sometimes *fasted*, that is, wanted food for a while. They thought they could pray better in this way, and they took this plan to get the mastery of their body and keep down its lusts and appetites. Very good men have done this; it is still done in some Christian Churches, and it used to be done in our own Church in Scotland. John the Baptist and his disciples fasted. The disciples of Jesus did not fast while He was with them; they were too happy then to fast (Matt. ix. 15). Jesus does not here forbid to fast, but He teaches His disciples one thing about it, and this time again by the example of the hypocrites. They when they fasted put on a sad countenance, and left their faces unwashed, and their hair untrimmed, and without the oil with which it was the practice to anoint the hair,—all this to be seen of men. Jesus bade His disciples avoid showing off in this way; keep their sorrow for their sins secret between them and God; willingly lose the earthly praise for the heavenly (vv. 16-18).

LESSONS

1. Have you ever given anything of your own to the poor, or to help a good work, such as a mission, or an orphanage, or a hospital? What was it that decided you to give? Was it love and pity and a desire to please the Lord and help His work, or did you do it to be like others, to be seen by the collector, and because you were afraid to be thought 'mean'? Some children spend money which they get to be their own on good things they fancy, and then trouble their parents for money to put into the collecting-box in order that they may be seen to be like others! Beware of this! God is not pleased by it. There is no reward from Him for that; and even when the money, or the thing you give away, is your own, if you let the desire to be seen and thought well of creep in, this will rob you of the reward for which God would have written you down in heaven.

2. In your prayers also be very careful never to let Satan put into your heart the desire to be thought well of by men. *Be true* in your religion. Do nothing religious in such a way that there is no reward for it from God. 'Let nothing be done through strife and vainglory.' You may sometimes read v. 6 over before you begin to pray in the quiet place which you make your closet (see end of Lesson X.), and these words of Jesus to you by yourself ('thou') will help you to pray with love and hope.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

XVIII.—THE TWO FOUNDATIONS

Matt. vii. 21-29

I. **A Warning.**—Our lesson for to-day is about the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had spoken in that sermon many words so true and beautiful that they will never pass away. How does He end it? By warning against this danger that goes with all sermons,—that people may hear and not do what they have heard. Some who hear a sermon refuse to do it,—plainly say, 'We will not do that!' This happens, however, but seldom, because the words of Jesus are felt to be so true. But it very often happens that people who hear His words *agree* to them, *approve* of them, *praise* them, even intend to do them, and call Him 'Lord' and 'Master' as if they believed in Him, and were resolved to do His will, and yet after all they do it not. This is a great danger to themselves, because they come *so near* doing, or it is so *like* doing, that they are apt to think it enough for their salvation, which it is not. So it was against this that Jesus warned us in v. 21. (Read and explain 'will of My Father' to be the same as *His words.*)

II. **A Glimpse of the Day of Judgment.**—And then lest people should still fall into this error, He gave a glimpse of the Judgment Day. Three things make this glimpse very serious.

1. He shows Himself as the Judge in that great day. The lips that were speaking now on the Mount would speak the sentence of doom. And the sentence would be, 'Depart from Me.'

2. The people to whom He would say that were not those only who had wickedly refused to do His words, but people who had done things so good and so like what He had said, that they would fancy He would be satisfied.

3. Many would be in this sad case; it would be so common His hearers should dread it the more. (Read in vv. 22, 23 what Jesus said.) This surprises us very much. Men, we know, may preach Christ without obeying Him in their own hearts; but we could not have thought, if Jesus had not told us, that many may do much good by their preaching and yet themselves be rejected by Him. (*Prophesied = preached; wonderful works* are conversions, etc. Persuading a man to give up drunkenness is like casting a devil out of him.) Jesus knows His true followers; 'I never knew you'—that is, as I know My own.

III. **A Similitude.**—After this glimpse of the Judgment Day, Jesus brought His sermon to a close by a similitude (or likeness) taken from things easily understood by everybody. You know that in building a house the first and chief thing is *the foundation.* The builders dig down till they get a firm base for the walls to rest on. In hilly countries where the streams are full in winter though often nearly dry in summer, great care is needed, for a house built in summer might have its foundation sapped in winter and fall. (Our mission house at Darjeeling is in great danger of falling (1890)

because the slope it is on is being sapped by a stream.) And in hot countries (like the Holy Land) they have storms of wind and rain of greater violence, and much more dangerous to houses, than any with us; though in our country too we have had great falls of houses, of the Tay Bridge, and other disasters by storms of wind. The best foundation is *rock*, which does not give way; the worst, *sand*, by the side of a stream. Now in the end of His sermon Jesus made these things a glass in which might be seen the wise man and the foolish man among His hearers. (Read vv. 24, 25, 26, 27.)

1. You see from what Jesus says here that every one of us who hears His words is *building*. Every day we are building; all we think and say and do is like materials that we are putting into the building which it is the work of our life to raise. *Our behaviour, good or bad, is like building.*

2. The building we are putting up is a *house*. It is not a *barn*, or a *mill*, that will only cost us money and loss of labour if it fall. It is a *house*, which will cost us our life if it fall; it will crush ourselves if it is not right.

3. The house we are building is sure to be tried by storms and floods. What does Jesus mean by these? *Afflictions* are storms,—great griefs and losses. If a man, for example, loses all his property, or loses his health and cannot work any more for his living—that is a storm. And the great flood that is to test every man and his building of life is the *Judgment Day*.

4. Jesus teaches here that if in our behaviour we are setting ourselves first of all to obey Him and keep His words, we shall be wise and we shall be shown to be wise, for the house of our life will be on a good foundation, on a *rock* indeed, and none of the storms of life will shake it down. It will stand firm even through the storm and flood of the Judgment.

But if in our behaviour we are only *intending* to do His words, *approving* them, not *doing* them, we are foolish, and shall be seen to be foolish. Our house is built upon sand, and cannot stand the storms; at the last day's flood it will certainly fall, and the fall will be 'great,' fatal, crushing.

LESSONS

1. Be very happy if you are making it the principal thing in your life to do what Jesus says. Jesus is to be trusted and His words are true. If you are placing your hope in Him and in His words, then you are building on what is sure and will never fail you. Never envy anybody who is not doing that, though he seems to get on well. And when people advise you to work hard and try to get on, remember that is not the principal thing; *to be on the rock* is the principal thing.

2. Take warning in time if you are not seeking first to obey the Lord Jesus. It is not enough to be busy and industrious and prosperous. If you are not *on the rock* with your building, all the trouble you take is wasted. Suppose a man makes a fortune and builds a fine house, and asks an old friend to pay him a visit in it. And when he is there he takes his friend through the house and shows him its well-built walls, its fine rooms, its windows that light it, its furniture that makes it comfortable, its pictures

and beautiful things that adorn it, and then says there is only one thing I am not sure of—*the foundation; that is* not sure. What will his friend say to him? 'The foundation not sure! Then all the trouble you have taken is wasted. Let me go from this house; I had rather be in the poorest cottage! I could not have thought any man could be so foolish as you!'

Are not we as foolish if we take much trouble in our life and try to get the beautiful and pleasant things without making sure that we and our work are *on the Rock*? But we may greatly rejoice if we can say—

'On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.'

XIX.—HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

Matt. viii. 5-13; Luke vii. 1-10

From Words to Works.—Our lesson to-day is about a thing that happened immediately after the Sermon on the Mount—'when He had ended all His sayings in the audience of the people' (Luke vii. 1). After speaking these wonderful words Jesus did some wonderful works, and we are to read of one of them which happened in Capernaum.

I. **The Centurion.**—The man for whom it was done was a *centurion*. Do you know what that means? It means an officer in the army—not the Jews' army; they had no army; they had been conquered by the Romans, and the soldiers in the country were of the Roman army, just as our British soldiers are in India which we have conquered. This officer was about as high as a captain with us; for a centurion had a hundred men under him; and he was a man, as the story we are told here shows, of a very remarkable and interesting character.

1. We see first that he was a very **kind** man. We see this from the way in which he behaved to a slave of his. In these days all men of his rank had slaves, and the slaves were often treated with great cruelty. They could put them to death if they chose, and they often did it, sometimes in terrible ways. Kind men, of course, were kind to their slaves, and this centurion must have been a kind master, for he had a slave who was so dear to him that when the slave was sick (of palsy), and at the point of death, he was as anxious about him as if he had been a child of his own (Luke vii. 2, 3). (Servant here is for bondservant = slave.)

2. We see also that this centurion was a **devout** man. Soldiers are often devout men. You must have heard of many officers of our British army who have been very devout men—General Gordon, General Havelock, Captain Hedley Vicars, and hundreds more. But it was more easy for them to be worshippers of the true God than for this centurion. The true God was the God of their own country. This centurion had to forsake the gods of Rome and take for his God the God of the Jews, a people who had been conquered by the Romans and were greatly despised by them. Most men like him would have paid no heed to the Jews' religion, and scorned to worship the God of a subject people. But this centurion gave thought to the matter, opened his mind to the truth, and perceived in his heart that the God of the Jews was the true God, and that the Bible they read in their synagogues was a book of truth and holiness. So he became a worshipper of God—a devout man. And several things show that his devotion was very true. He did not conceal his religion; he loved the Jews (whom other Romans despised) for the sake of their God; and he was so liberal in helping God's worship that at his own cost he built a synagogue at Capernaum (Luke vii. 4, 5).

3. Another thing about him—he was a very **humble** man. When his slave was so ill, and he wanted Jesus to come and cure him, he did not go himself to ask Him. He thought himself not worthy, but asked the elders of the Jews (rulers of the synagogue) to go for him to Jesus and make the request. And when Jesus at once agreed, and was on the way to his house,

he sent friends of his to bid Jesus not to come any farther; that he was not worthy that Jesus should be at so much trouble for him or come under his roof; he would not ask Jesus to do more than speak a word where He was to heal the slave. Read vv. 6, 7.

4. But the most remarkable thing about this centurion was his **faith in Jesus.** It showed faith to send for Jesus and ask Him to come as he did at first. It showed more faith to feel sure that Jesus could do the mighty work of healing palsy without coming to the place—that distance made no difference to Jesus. And his faith showed itself still more in the message he sent. What he said was like this: 'I know what it is to give orders and be obeyed. I am accustomed to get orders from my commanding officer, and I have soldiers under me who do my bidding at once when I give an order. I know you have only to give an order of a single word and you will be obeyed.' He evidently believed that Jesus was like a great commanding officer over all powers, and that diseases would go if He said the word. Read vv. 7, 8.

II. **Jesus.**—1. **He marvelled.**—We have seen how great thoughts this man had of Jesus; now we shall see what Jesus thought of him. v. 9 (first clause). Nothing pleased Jesus so much as faith; and this man's faith not only pleased Jesus, it astonished Him. Only twice do we read that Jesus 'marvelled,' or was surprised, at anything. Once was at the unbelief of the people of His own city Nazareth; it seemed so extraordinary to Him. The other time he marvelled—this time a happy surprise—was at the greatness of this man's belief in Him. It was the more wonderful that the man was a Gentile, and had not had the opportunities which Jews had had. Yet he had surpassed them. See what Jesus said. v. 9. He awarded this man the praise for faith above all whom He had yet met, and told them he stood higher for faith than any of the Jews.

2. **He prophesied.**—Turn to and read Matt. viii. 11. 'I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west' (that is, from the far-off Gentile lands). Why did Jesus tell this now? Partly because this man made Him think of it. This man's case was like the first drop which told Jesus of a great rain coming. He was like the first sheaf of a great harvest, and the heart of Jesus swelled with joy at the thought of that harvest. But the chief reason why Jesus told this was that He might warn the people round Him. They were Jews, and the Jews thought that the kingdom of heaven was for them; that they were the children and heirs of the kingdom; that when it came it would be like a great, bright, well-lighted feast at which they would sit down with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and that the Gentiles would be left outside in the dark, and would be weeping and gnashing their teeth for sorrow and anger that they were not inside in the light. But Jesus saw that the Jews were losing their place for want of faith, and that multitudes of the Gentiles would believe in Him like this centurion, and enter the kingdom of heaven instead of them. So He told the people round Him in order that they might take warning. Read again Matt. viii. 11, and also 12.

3. **He healed.**—The distance made no difference to Jesus. The cure took place as quickly as when Jesus put forth His hand and touched the leper (Luke vii. 10).

LESSONS

1. **What do you think of Jesus?**—Are your thoughts of Him like the centurion's? Do you believe that He can do great things for you? that distance makes no difference to Him? that He has but to speak the word? Are you humble, like the centurion, not thinking yourself worthy to go to Jesus, yet going to Him with confidence, because all may go, and He has said, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out?'

2. **What does Jesus think of you?**—You have been taught about Him at the Sunday School; you have heard many gracious and wonderful things about Him. Is He glad because you trust Him so much? Is He often pleased by the way in which you pray to Him? Or is He astonished that you trust Him so little and think so little about Him?

FOR THE TEACHER

Let the passage from Luke be used in teaching with the addition of Matt. viii. 11, 12. It may, if necessary, be said that the two accounts do not contradict one another, although St. Matthew writes as if the centurion himself came to Jesus. In short narrative a man is said to do a thing, though he does it by others, as Solomon is said to have built the temple and Pilate to have scourged Jesus.

XX.—JESUS' GRACIOUS INVITATION

Matt. xi. 25-30

Introduction.—Before Jesus spoke these words which are to be our lesson to-day He had had some very sad thoughts in His mind. It is always sad to think of people who have good opportunities, yet do not come to the knowledge of the truth, and so are not saved. Now Jesus saw that this was the case even with the cities in which most of His mighty works were done. He saw that His labour there was in vain. The people of these cities had not repented. And it was with great sorrow as well as indignation that Jesus upbraided Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum as we read of Him doing. Read vv. 20-24.

I. **Thanksgiving.**—Yet in the very next words which we read—words spoken apparently soon after—we find Jesus giving thanks to God with holy joy. In fact we find Him uttering a burst of praise, and speaking it aloud so that His disciples heard what He said to God. We seldom find Jesus so full of joy as on this occasion. What was it made so great a change in His feeling,—from holy sorrow to holy joy? It was that He had obtained great comfort for His sorrow. What was His comfort? It was in thinking that His Father was Lord of heaven and earth, and so nothing would happen without His will, and that will would be good. His Father would do nothing but what was right. Read v. 26. And about one thing especially Jesus felt in very happy agreement with His Father. It was not the clever people, who thought they knew much, but the teachable and humble, who thought they knew little, who came to know the things of the kingdom of God. God chose for the knowledge of His secrets, not the wise and prudent and conceited, but those who had the spirit of the little child. This gave Jesus great joy, and He praised God for it. Read vv. 25, 26.

II. **Revelation.**—As soon as He had finished His praise and thanks to His Father, Jesus revealed some very high things to His disciples. He went on speaking, not now to God, but to them, and He revealed some secrets that were between Himself and His Father. Why did He do so now? Because these secrets explain His joy in regard to revelation to 'babes.' What was the cause of that joy? It was because He Himself was like a little child with His Father. Jesus always had great liking for the spirit of the little child,—the humble, teachable, trustful spirit. You recollect how once He set a child in the midst of His disciples and said, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Why is the spirit of the child so good and so much loved by Jesus? Because it is His own spirit, and on account of it His Father loves Him and delivers all things unto Him. Read v. 27. '*All things are delivered unto Me*' is an expression that includes in it '*all mysteries are revealed to Me.*' Jesus lets us know that the reason why the Father reveals them to Him is because He is *the Son*, and has perfectly the heart of a child toward the Father. So you see, when God chose to reveal things on earth to *babes* (that is, to people of childlike spirit), it gave pleasure to Jesus, because it was like what had been going on between His Father and Himself. Is it not a wonderful

thing to get this glimpse into heaven, and see that the very highest thing there is love, like the love in our own homes between a father and his child that trusts him?

III. **Invitation.**—Next, and immediately after this revelation to His disciples, Jesus spoke perhaps the most gracious invitation ever uttered even by Himself. It is full of pity and it is wonderfully rich in promise. His own heart was so filled with happiness in thinking of His Father, as He had been doing, and in thinking of how much the Father had delivered to Him, that He pitied the sorrows of men greatly, and felt able to relieve them out of the fulness given to Him by His Father. So he said (v. 28), 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

1. Think how compassionate and tender His invitation is.

2. See also how wide it is, and how much it undertakes to do. How rich Jesus must have felt in His heart, what a wealth of power to bless He must have been conscious of in Himself, when in a world with so much sorrow and trouble He could say, 'Come unto Me,' etc.! [Suppose an emperor on some high day of state were to utter words like these, how foolish he would make himself! For how little would he be able to fulfil them! He might, indeed, by his wealth and power relieve some burdens; but there would be troubles even in the little circle of his court far beyond his power to remove. For the greatest emperor to use these words would be as if he tried to wield a sceptre far too heavy for him.] Jesus could say this, not for a little circle of hearers only, but for all men, and for all troubles of men.

3. Try now to understand *what rest* Jesus means here. It is the rest which He Himself had. He pitied people because while He had rest they had not, and He invited them to come, because He would give them the rest He Himself had. Now was this rest to be a stoppage of all their labours in the world, and the removal of all sorrows out of their life, and that they should get their wish in everything they fancied, and so be at rest? Jesus Himself had not this rest. He laboured, He sorrowed: He toiled much, and was the 'Man of sorrows.' He had in prospect now the great sorrow of the *cross*; yet He had rest in His soul,—rest from all discontent or murmuring,—rest from all division of mind,—rest from any thought of wishing things to be other than they were. He had this rest by His perfect trust in His Father's will and appointment of all things. He could say of the worst things, 'Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.' He had, in short, the rest that belongs to the spirit of the child—to the son who perfectly trusts his father.

Read v. 29. These words show that the rest He means is what He had, to be learned of Him, by taking on us His yoke (that is, the yoke which He willingly bore of obedience to His Father's will), and being meek and lowly like Him.

4. If we come to Jesus He will *give us* this rest. Jesus not only tells us the secret of His rest here, and bids us learn it and imitate Him, He invites us to come to Him and He will give it. He will take us into the secret with Himself if we come, and will enable us to share it with Him. He can do this by giving us His Holy Spirit. It is the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit to take things from the heart of Jesus and fill our heart with them,

and so we can have that wonderful gift of the spirit of the little child, which Jesus so honoured, and which made His own heart so full of rest in spite of all His burdens. And if He could say, with all that was laid upon Him, 'My yoke is easy, and My burden is light' (v. 30), how cheerful and joyful our religion may be, who have so little to bear in comparison!

LESSON

The great practical lesson here is that every trouble and perplexity and fear of our life should remind us to go to Jesus, and get from Him that spirit of a son that trusts God and says, 'Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.' This spirit in us will make our common duties a pleasure and will lighten wonderfully the worst troubles. Here is a story which shows how it lightened the affliction of being deaf and dumb. A gentleman was visiting a home and place of education for young people who had that affliction, and after he had seen through it all he was asked to put a question to some of them by writing with chalk on the black-board. He did not know what to ask, but at last he wrote this, 'Why did God make you all deaf and dumb and me so that I can hear and speak?' Naturally their eyes filled with tears; it was a great mystery. But one of the little fellows went up to the board and wrote this answer, 'Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.' That was enough to give rest unto their souls.

Remember the lines of the hymn—

'Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distrest?
"Come to Me," saith One, "and coming,
Be at rest."

'If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me nay?
"Not till earth, and not till heaven,
Pass away!"'

XXI.—JESUS AND HIS MOTHER AND BRETHREN

Matt. xii. 46-50

I. **The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus.**—Jesus was not brought up as an only child in the family at Nazareth (see Lesson V.) He had brothers and sisters. We can even tell the names of the brothers (Mark vi. 3)—*James*, *Joses*, *Judas*, and *Simon*. From the way in which they are spoken of along with the mother of Jesus, it is natural to suppose that they were children of Joseph and Mary, younger than Jesus. Some think that these brothers and sisters were children of Joseph by a former marriage, in which case they would all be older than Jesus. [Their reason for thinking this is, that when Jesus was dying He gave His mother into the charge of John, the disciple whom He loved, who from that hour took her to his own home (John xix. 26, 27), and certainly it requires explanation that she should be taken care of by John, if she had sons of her own.] Whichever way it was there is no doubt of this, that during the years in which Jesus was growing up at Nazareth there were brothers and sisters who had the same home, shared with Him its joys and duties, and were companions with Him at school and at play. Perhaps this was good for Jesus, giving Him an intimate acquaintance with family life, and so enabling Him to know many of our tenderest feelings by His own experience. Certainly it was a great privilege to the others to have Jesus for a brother. What happy memories they must have had of their young years together!

II. **A Message to Jesus and His Answer.**—Our lesson to-day takes us away from that private home life of Jesus into the middle of His public life. These verses (v. 46, etc.) tell of a time when multitudes were daily thronging round Him, so that He and His disciples could hardly get time to eat, and there was much excitement on account of His words and His miracles. He was sitting one day in the midst of a crowd, many of whom were not friendly to Him, when a message was brought Him. One of the crowd told Him that His mother and His brethren were standing outside, unable to get near, but wishing to speak to Him. Read vv. 46, 47.

Now what do you expect Jesus to do? What do you think would be right? What would you like to find Him do? Would you be pleased to hear that He thanked the man for his message, instantly sent away the crowd, or hastened to finish His discourse, in order to speak with His mother and brethren, or that He bade the crowd make way and let them get to Him? Instead of this, Jesus, without any thanks to the man, answered him with a question that seemed as if He were disowning His mother and His brethren. Read v. 48. Then He pointed to His disciples, and seemed to prefer them, and put them in the place of His mother and brethren. Read v. 49.

III. **What Jesus meant by this Surprise.**—This is a surprise to us. But Jesus often *teaches by surprising*. He says something which is so strange that it seems as if it could not be true; but it makes people think, and then they find out the truth He meant them to learn. Of

course the disciples to whom Jesus pointed could not be 'His mother and His brethren,' according to the flesh. Most of them were no relatives of His by blood. Why did He call them relatives then? Because they were relatives of His *according to the spirit*. They were doing the will of His Father in heaven, and so they were true children of that Father. They were of the same *heavenly* family as Jesus. See what Jesus says in v. 50.

The brothers of Jesus, however, were not of that heavenly family. They did not believe on Him (John vii. 5). During the ministry of Jesus they seem to have taken no part except sometimes to thwart or criticise Him. And from Mark iii. 20, 21 we learn that about this time they thought Him 'beside Himself,'—out of His mind. They heard that He was so busy that He and His disciples had not time for their food. So they concluded that Jesus was out of His mind, that it would be well to lay hold of Him, take Him back to Nazareth, and keep Him for a time under restraint; and for this purpose (it seems) they were now come.

Mary, His mother, was with them. And did she not believe in Him—she who had been told about Him by the angel Gabriel, had seen Him worshipped by the shepherds and by the wise men, and had pondered in her heart all the sayings about Him? No doubt Mary still believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but the Messiah she expected was one with victorious armies, humbling the proud and ascending the throne of David. Jesus' idea of a kingdom of goodness in men's hearts that would cost toil and suffering to set up, with a cross for Him before the crown—this Mary did not understand. So now hearing that her Son was in the midst of such exhausting toil, neglecting His food, and that the Rabbis and Pharisees (the principal religious people) were saying that He was in league with Beelzebub (v. 24), she came to think too that He was 'beside Himself,' and joined with His brothers in wishing to lay hold of Him. Perhaps she thought He would be the better of rest at Nazareth.

How lonely Jesus would have been now but for His disciples! Think of those two companies: the mother of Jesus and His brethren, who thought Him out of His mind, and the disciples of Jesus, who believed on Him and sought to do His Heavenly Father's will. Which of these companies were nearer to Jesus? The former, *according to the flesh*; the latter, *according to the spirit*. In *earthly* relationship the friends from Nazareth were nearer; in *spiritual* or *heavenly* relationship, the disciples were nearer. And Jesus here teaches that to be in the same spiritual or heavenly family with Him is far the more important. This makes a closer and a tenderer link to Him than even that which bound Him to His mother Mary and to His brethren. Read again v. 50.

We do not mean that Jesus forgot that Mary was His mother, or thought little of this link to her, or even of the tie between Him and His brothers and sisters. He did not really disown them; that would not have been like Him. It would not have been right; for our earthly relationships are very sacred. It was God who joined us in families. He made the link that binds us to our father, mother, brother, or sister. His command is, 'Honour thy father and mother.' And Jesus did not forget His mother even when He was suffering on the cross, but gave His friend John charge of her. But here He teaches that thousands may be more closely related to Him than His brothers and sisters then were; they will be if they choose

the will of His Father as what they will do. Even Mary was not entitled to be near to Jesus in heaven because she bore Him, and nursed Him, and brought Him up, but because she believed in Him, and was like Him in heart.

LESSONS

1. Love your parents, you who have parents living; and love one another at home, you who have brothers and sisters there. There are many reasons why you should do this and be kind to one another. One reason is, because families are often soon far separated. It may not be long till you that are now brothers and sisters together, will have oceans or continents between you. Those who were children together are sometimes carried far apart in life, and are buried in far separated graves.

> 'They grew in beauty side by side,
> They filled one home with glee,
> Their graves are severed far and wide,
> By mount and stream and sea.'

So be kind to one another now at home while you are together.

2. Do good to one another, and pray for one another's salvation. Help one another to do the will of our Father in heaven, and so, though separated on earth, you will be united in heaven. Even if one near and dear to you wanders away from God, do not cease to pray for him, and he may yet be brought into the family of God. We are encouraged to hope this by the very case of Jesus and His brothers. We may be sure it was a great grief to Jesus that His brothers were unbelieving. We may be sure He prayed for them, and though we only know one thing more He did, it seems to have been what made them believers. After His resurrection He showed Himself alive to *James* (1 Cor. xv. 7). Jesus hardly showed Himself to any then but to believers, but He did it to James, His brother; and this seems to have made him a believer, and all the other brothers through his influence; for we find 'Mary the mother of Jesus *and His brethren*' in the list of the first believing company that met after Jesus had ascended up into heaven (Acts i. 14).

3. Choose for yourselves—whatever others do—to do the will of the Father in heaven. Jesus will then claim you as His near kindred. You will be nearer to Him than His brothers and sisters at Nazareth were. Nothing makes us so near and dear to Him as this. Remember again what He says in this verse, 'Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.'

FOR THE TEACHER

In this, as in other cases, the teacher may see fit to use only one of the 'Lessons' at the end, and of these the third comes most directly from the narrative.

XXII.—PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matt. xiii. 1-9, 18-23; Mark iv. 1-9, 14-20; Luke viii. 4-15

I. **A new Place of Preaching.**—We read some Sundays ago about Jesus preaching on a mountain. To-day we are to read about His preaching from a boat near the side of the lake which was called the 'Sea of Galilee.' He went into the boat in order more conveniently to speak to the multitudes that had gathered round Him. He sat in the boat and the people stood on the rising slope of the shore before Him, like people in the gallery of a church. The boat was like the pulpit of that church and the lofty sky its roof. Read vv. 1, 2.

II. **A new kind of Preaching.**—This time Jesus began a new kind of preaching, which people had never heard Him use before. He began to speak in **parables** to them. What is a parable? It is a story that has *two meanings*: the first a plain meaning that everybody can easily understand, the second a more hidden meaning. [Or, we may say, an *earthly* meaning and a *heavenly* meaning; a *natural* and a *spiritual* meaning. It is something like a riddle, only it is very *serious* and *beautiful*, and has very solemn lessons.] This day from the boat Jesus spoke nothing but parables. The people did not understand them, nor did His disciples understand them; but Jesus explained them to the disciples afterwards when they were together in the house.

III. **The Parable of the Sower.**—The first parable that Jesus spoke is called the parable of the Sower. Our lesson to-day is about it.

IV. **The first Meaning of it.**—Now a parable is a story with two meanings. Let us see then that we all know the *first* meaning of this parable. You find that from v. 3 of Matt. xiii. to v. 9. [Keep your books open there.] 'Behold a sower went forth to sow.' Have you all seen a man sowing corn? [Town children may need to have this described—the season of sowing, *spring*,—the land first ploughed, then the man who sows carrying the seed in an open bag tied about his body and scattering it in handfuls.] Now the parable tells of four different kinds of ground that the seeds fell upon, and four different things that happened to them then.

1. 'Some seeds fell by the **wayside**' (v. 4). Have you ever seen a little footpath through a field, or along the side of it, trodden hard, with no hedge or fence between it and the rest of the field that would keep the seed off it? That is what is meant here by the 'wayside.' Well, some of the seeds fell upon that, and the fowls of the air came and devoured them up (v. 4). Birds very often come in flocks to a field where ploughing or sowing is going on; they come for food.

2. 'Some fell upon **stony places**, where they had not much earth' (v. 5). Have you sometimes seen in a field places where the rock was near the surface and the earth very thin upon it? That is the kind of places called here 'stony places'; it means rather 'rocky places.' Well, some seeds fell upon these places and sprung up fast. But you may have often seen the

corn on a place like that grow yellow and withered looking when hot weather came. So when the sun grew hot this withered away (vv. 5, 6).

3. 'Some fell **among thorns**' (v. 7). This does not mean a heap of thorns lying atop on the ground. It means a thorny weed, like nettles, whose roots were in the ground. The roots of these weeds had not been gathered out, and so the weeds grew up with the crop that was sown and choked the crop. There might be straw, but there was not corn in the crop (v. 7).

4. 'But other fell into **good ground**'—that is, ground that was soft and deep and well cleaned. The seeds that fell into this kind of ground throve well, and came to be a very good crop—indeed in some cases a wonderful crop. Read v. 8. [Explain *thirty-fold*, etc.—thirty times as much corn in harvest as had been sown in spring, etc.]

These are the four different kinds of earth into which the seeds fell, and the four different things that happened to them? That is the *first* meaning of the parable.

V. **The second Meaning of it.**—Now for the *second* meaning of it. The disciples of Jesus would not have understood it if He had not told it them in the house; we are told what He said from v. 18 to v. 23. These verses contain the second meaning of the parable. The *sower* means *a man preaching* or *teaching*. Jesus Himself was the great Sower. The *seed* means *the Word of God*. The four different kinds of ground mean four different kinds of hearers with four different kinds of hearts.

1. The first kind (the trodden footpath or wayside, where the fowls devoured up the seed) means people **whose hearts are trodden so hard** by thinking only of this world, and by letting a constant stream of worldly thoughts go through their mind, that when they hear the Word of God it has no interest for them; it does not sink into their hearts; it just lies on the top, and whenever the preaching or teaching is done, the devil can easily get it carried away out of their mind by some trifling talk or business. The fowls of the air in the parable just mean anything that puts the Word of God out of mind after people have heard it (v. 19).

2. The second kind (the rocky places where the seed did spring up, but withered as soon as the sun was hot)—that means people who after they hear the Word of God **have at first a great mind to be good** people, but when they have anything to suffer for religion they give it up. Read vv. 20, 21. The heat of the sun meant tribulation, etc. [Pliable in the *Pilgrim's Progress* is an example of this kind of hearer. Very often such a one seems to be more zealous than others: 'Come, let us mend our pace,' said Pliable to Christian.]

3. The third kind (the places with the thorny weed in them, where the seed was choked after it came up)—that means people who after they hear the Word of God would do it and be good, set about it even and keep at it, but they **have so much care about their poverty**, or **so much thought about their riches**, that they have not time enough for religion. Their religion does not get room enough in their life, and so it is choked. It goes on perhaps all their lives, but it has only an appearance; there is not fruit to please God in it (v. 22).

4. The fourth kind (the good soil, well ploughed and cleaned of weeds

and deep, where there was a splendid crop)—that means people who after they hear the Word of God **keep it in their heart and please God much by doing it.** All please Him much, and some of them please Him exceedingly ; that is the meaning of the different quantities, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, etc.

LESSON

The lesson of this parable for everybody who hears a sermon or attends a Sunday School is, '**Take heed how ye hear!**' It is for want of good hearing that the precious Word of God, though abundantly preached and taught, does not come to such abundant and noble fruit as it might. 'Take heed' very earnestly, because there are so many ways in which the preaching and teaching may be made to fail. Three kinds of bad hearers are named here.

1. Take heed not to be like the first—*hard-hearted.* That is the largest class of hearers at the present day in many places. They have never given much thought to the Word of God ; it does not interest them, and as soon as they leave the church, some talk or thought about ordinary worldly matters makes them quite forget it. Who watches to take God's Word out of people's minds in this way? Satan (v. 19).

2. Take heed not to be like the second kind of bad hearers—*shallow-hearted.* There are not so many of them, but they are a greater grief to a preacher of God's Word or to a teacher ; for they begin well, and he has good hope of them, and then he is disappointed to find that they are soon discouraged. God also is grieved.

3. Take heed not to be like the third kind of bad hearers—*half-hearted,* who give only half of their heart to doing God's Word. Theirs is the saddest case of all, for they seem to go on ; they may continue to appear respectable and Christian all their lives, but in God's sight they bring no fruit to perfection. Some of them are rich people, who have given their hearts too much to their riches ; some of them are poor, who have grown careful and anxious in the world.

4. Try whenever you hear the Word of God to be like the last hearers—*true-hearted* and *whole-hearted.* Lay up what you hear in your heart ; let your thoughts go often back to it ; begin to do it promptly ; go on in it, and give it the chief place in your life. So you will please God ; and some of you may do so much good in your life that God will count you among those who have brought forth fruit 'a hundredfold.'

XXIII.—PARABLE OF THE TARES

Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43

Introduction.—Our last lesson, you remember, was about that day in our Lord's life when He spoke to the people from a boat as His pulpit, and when He first used a new kind of teaching—that *by parables*. We read His first parable. To-day we are to take for our lesson the second, which we find in this chapter, beginning at v. 24.

I. **The first Meaning of the Parable.**—You remember we said that a parable is a story with two meanings. Let us go forward, step by step, in our study of this one, and begin by seeing that we understand rightly its *first* meaning. It is a story that carries us through the whole history of a crop of wheat—the seed-time, the growing-time, and the harvest.

1. **The seed-time.**—*A man sowed good seed in his field* (v. 24). No one can expect a clean crop of good grain unless he sows unmixed and good seed. This man did so. But in the night-time, when men were taking their natural rest, his enemy came and did a very mean and wicked thing. It was a thing by which much harm could be done easily and secretly by a cowardly malicious person. The name for it is *over-sowing*. It is very rare, indeed, in Britain; but in Eastern countries it is not infrequent—viz. to sow the seeds of a bad weed over a field that has already been sown with good seed. The particular kind of bad weed sown in this case not only does harm, as all weeds do, by using up the strength of the ground, and so impoverishing the crop, but also its own seeds when they ripen are an intoxicant poison so strong that if even a pickle or two be ground among the flour, it may cause giddiness and other disagreeable feelings. This weed grows readily in corn-fields, and is so extremely like wheat in its earlier stages that even a farmer's eye can hardly tell the difference till it is shot'; then it is known from the wheat by its blacker heads. [Read v. 25, and explain that though it is called 'tares' in our translation of the Gospel, it must not be thought to be what are called 'tares' in our fields—a very useful kind of crop. A better name for this weed would be 'darnel.']

2. **The growing-time.**—For a while the master and his servants who had sown the crop had pleasure in it; it seemed good; their labour seemed well spent; but when 'it brought forth fruit' (was 'shot,' as we say), then appeared the darnel also (v. 26). The darker ears showed themselves, and the crop was plainly very mixed of good and bad. The servants of the householder, puzzled, came and said—v. 27. He calmly answered, 'An enemy hath done this.' The servants then, in zeal for their master, in indignation at such wickedness, and in some pride in the field they had laboured at, proposed to go into the field and gather up the darnel (v. 28). But the master answered still with calm patience, pointing out harm that would be done. Read v. 29. They might sometimes mistake wheat for weeds; and besides the roots of both were so intertwined they would do damage.

3. **The harvest-time.**—But, further, the master shows a deep reason for his patience. He carries them on in their thoughts to the harvest-time.

He will secure an unmixed crop after all. Separation will be made then completely. That will be the fit time, and it shall be done. Read v. 30.

II. **The second Meaning of the Parable.**—We shall go now to our second stage in our study of the parable; we shall try to understand its *second*—its *spiritual* or *heavenly* meaning. And this is not so difficult as it might have been, for the disciples of Jesus, after He came into the house, asked Him to explain it, and He did. Read v. 36.

Before we read any of Jesus' explanation, I would ask if any of you children ever wondered how God allowed this world to have such a mixture of good and evil in it? Since God made all things and God is good, you may have wondered how evil ever began; why God allowed it to begin at all; and why He does not destroy the devil at once, and stop all evil. Many wise men, as well as many thoughtful children, have wondered much about all this.

But there is another place where it is even more perplexing and sad to find a mixture of evil, and that is in the Church of Christ,—the company of the disciples and followers of Jesus. And it is about the mixture of evil men in the Church that Jesus teaches us in this parable. We know this parable tells about the Church, for it begins, '*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto.*' And the Church is a part of the kingdom of heaven. The disciples of Jesus expected the 'kingdom of heaven' to be perfect at once. He knew they would be greatly disappointed when they found the Church also mixed with evil. So He told them this parable in order to prepare them, that they might not be so surprised, and might know what to do.

1. The **seed-time and its meaning.**—Read vv. 37, 38, and first clause of v. 39. Jesus here tells how evil comes into the Church. It is the doing of the wicked one. Wherever Jesus does people good, Satan comes just there and tries to mingle evil with it. That is just his way,—in a secret, cowardly fashion,—to over-sow in another man's field. Jesus does not explain here how the devil came to be wicked at first. (He must have been good once, for God made him.) Nor does Jesus say why it is that the devil *is allowed* to bring wickedness into the Church. But the parable makes us sure that Jesus does not wish the evil there; it is not there because He does not mind; He (the Son of man) sows only good seed; all the harm is from the devil. The disciples of Jesus are therefore taught to hate it the more, and they are prepared not to be surprised at the sight of it.

2. **The growing-time, and the meaning** of the conversation which then took place,—particularly the proposal of the servants to go and gather up the weeds.—All good people and true servants of Jesus have a great desire that His Church should be pure; it is a great sorrow to them that there should be people in it who are not good, and often zealous Christians, and especially young Christians, have thought that such a separation should be made now as would make the Church have none but good people in it. They have thought that Christ's servants, His ministers, should do this; or they have thought to make a pure Church by all good people going out of the mixed Church and making a Church by themselves. But Jesus here forbids all this. He says, 'Let both grow together till the harvest.' And the reason He gives is, 'Lest ye gather up the wheat also.' That is to say, ministers

might make mistakes. Some people's conduct is so plainly bad that there is no doubt they are not Christ's servants, and they should be excluded from the Church till they repent; but about many it is not certain.

3. **The harvest-time and its meaning.**—This part of the parable answers the question, Is this mixture of evil with good always to go on in the Church? It tells that at the end of the world (or rather, '*the consummation of the age*'—the end of this dispensation of God and the beginning of a new one) there will be (1) a **speedy and complete separation.** The speed of it will be like that of harvest. You know how crop slowly grows and is ripened in the course of months; then suddenly the reapers are sent into the field, and in a few hours of their busy hands and instruments, it falls down and is bound in sheaves. So the end will be. And there is another thing promising speed and completeness—new servants will be sent for the reaping. Not those who sowed and proposed to gather up, and might have made mistakes. Not the present ministers of Christ's Church, but new servants—*strong*, *swift*, *unerring*. 'The reapers are the *angels*.' No mistake will they make between *wheat* and *tares*, between true Christians and false. A short work will they make of the great separation. Read vv. 39, 40, 41. (2) There will be **an awful difference after the separation.** Read v. 42, about what will happen to 'them which do iniquity.' This means some great pain, and grief and anger with themselves. Read v. 43, about the righteous. This means *glory*, *great* glory, *sudden* glory,—as when a dark cloud is drawn aside that veiled the sun, and now it shines forth so that you can hardly look at it. So, many many Christian people, the glory and beauty of whose faith and holiness are now hid by some veil of poverty, or infirmity, or deformity, or wrinkled age, will shine forth in splendour. And they will not only shine, they will be in bliss as in a happy home, for they will be 'in the kingdom of their Father.'

LESSONS

1. Let us see that we ourselves be not 'tares'—'darnel'—in Christ's field; the fruit of our life hurtful, even poisonous. Let us watch earnestly not to let Satan sow his bad seed in our hearts.

2. Let us see that we reverence all good Christian people, and if they are poor, or deformed, or despised by men, remember that this is but a veil which will yet be drawn aside, and they will 'shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'

FOR THE TEACHER

In speaking of 'the Church' see that the children do not take it to mean the *building*, but the *company* in which all baptized persons are included. From 'the field is the world' some have refused to understand this parable as of the Church. But it is a parable of 'the kingdom of heaven'; it is out of *the Son of man's kingdom* that the gathering is to take place (v. 41); so 'the world' in the first quoted expression indicates the space in which the Church is found,—all of which the Son of man claims right to.

XXIV.—PARABLES OF THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN

Matt. xiii. 31-33; Mark iv. 30-32; Luke xiii. 18-21

Introduction.—Again a lesson from our Lord's parables,—from two spoken on the same day with the others we have had,—immediately after the one about the wheat and the tares. We shall take these two together to-day, for Jesus evidently meant them to go together. They are very like one another in their meaning and lessons. When Jesus spoke the one just after the other, it was as when a man strikes two blows in succession on the same nail, to drive it deeper in.

I. **The first Meaning of the Parables.**—Let us do as we did before, and see that we know this thoroughly. They are both about very humble and insignificant matters. Jesus more than any other teacher that ever lived, could make common and lowly things teach us about high and holy things.

1. The first parable is about a grain of a small kind of seed called mustard seed. It was so small that it was a proverb (or by-word) in these countries, 'As small as a grain of mustard seed' (Matt. xvii. 20). We have none of this exact kind of seed in our country; but in the Holy Land it is well known. Though the seed is small the plant when full grown is of good size. It is bigger than any herb or vegetable; it is of the size of a bush or small tree; its branches are strong enough for birds to rest on, and they come to it to shelter among its leaves and to feed on its seeds when they are ripe. The first parable tells about the sowing and growing of such a grain of mustard seed, and how much greater the plant became in size than could have been expected from the smallness of the seed. Read Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

2. Though we have not in our country this mustard seed of the first parable, we have the leaven of the second. It is just the sour dough which is often used in baking bread. When a piece of sour dough is put into a lump of freshly mixed dough, the whole is gradually soured too. It ferments and 'works' (as people say) and spreads through the whole lump or mass, till all is changed and swells out much; and bread made of this, after it is fermented and swelled out, is lighter and more wholesome for food. [The ordinary bread we buy in Scotland from bakers is made of this leavened flour. Home-made bread is sometimes made of it, sometimes not.] Jesus in this second parable tells that a woman took some leaven and put it into the middle of three measures of meal (= the usual quantity made into bread in one *batch*). The little piece of leaven was out of sight in this large quantity of meal; but in course of time the whole quantity was made like it. The leaven worked and worked upon what was next it, and changed it, till the whole was leavened. Read in v. 33.

II. **The second Meaning of the Parables.**—Jesus did not give any explanation of these two parables. Perhaps His disciples thought they understood them and did not ask Him. We are left to find out the meaning

ourselves. We know that they have some *inner*, *spiritual* meaning, because Jesus in telling each of them says, 'The kingdom of heaven is like this.' We know therefore that they mean something about the kingdom of heaven—that kingdom which Jesus came to set up among men, and of which He taught His disciples so much.

1. One thing they both tell us is that **the kingdom of heaven has small beginnings.** We might have expected that if the kingdom of heaven were to come amongst men, it would have made for itself a great rent in the sky, and, with angel heralds proclaiming it, or with rollings of thunder and flashings of lightning, have dazzled men with its glory. We might have thought it would bring power and arms to force its way in the world. But no; Jesus tells us quite differently. The mustard seed was very small; the leaven was very little in comparison with the mass it was put into. So the Gospel began in this world with a few poor men. Jesus and His disciples were just a few poor men. How few they were among the multitudes of the great nations of the earth, and how little power they seemed to have!

2. Another thing the parables both tell is that though the beginnings of the kingdom of heaven are small, **it will have great endings.** What a difference between the large mustard plant like a tree and the little, tiny seed! What a difference between the whole lump of three measures leavened and the little bit put in at first! So the endings of the kingdom of heaven will be in comparison with its beginnings. See how kind Jesus was in telling these two parables after the first two. The first two were rather disheartening to His disciples. The very first showed that when the Word of God was preached there would be three kinds of bad hearers and only one good. The second showed that the wicked one would go on mixing evil with good even in the kingdom of heaven. But now Jesus shows in these two parables which come next, that, for all this, the Gospel would spread and spread in a wonderful manner. In fact the parable of the leaven foretells that the Gospel would influence and change the whole world. Notice that Jesus said, 'till *the whole* was leavened.' Would not this encourage His disciples greatly, especially when they began to preach the Gospel? They met with many oppositions and hindrances; they were often grieved by finding Satan's bad seed growing with the good they had sown, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts v.) But they would feel that they need not give up on account of these things, for they had the word of Jesus for it,—the word of Him who could foretell to the end,—that the growth of the good kingdom would go on and on till the whole world was overspread and changed by it.

3. Another thing these parables teach—**two ways in which the kingdom of heaven makes progress.** These two parables are alike in teaching all that has yet been mentioned. There is a little difference, however, between them that has a meaning. I wonder if you children can understand it. You notice that the mustard plant grew and spread visibly and openly by sending out branches and twigs. The leaven spread secretly by one bit influencing and changing the bit next to it, and so on. This means two ways in which the Gospel is spread. One is by its being openly preached, and by missionaries going into heathen countries to spread it there. Each new church or congregation is like a new branch; each new Christian

is like a new twig on the great tree. Another way, quite as important, is by the secret, quiet influence of good people's lives changing bad people's. If one good man be in a company, though he does not say anything, his conduct and his faith gradually make them think, and are often the means of their being changed and becoming like him. So you see the Gospel is spread in two ways—**by preaching** and **by example**; **by telling it** and **by living it.**

LESSONS

1. **Do not despise small beginnings in religion.**—It is a small beginning to teach one little child about Jesus, or to teach a class of little children in a Sunday School. But if the teaching gets into the heart, this beginning will grow and grow, and only Jesus Himself can tell how much good and blessing will come of it. Sometimes it has happened that a man who heard one text of the Bible, could not keep from thinking about it, till it changed him wholly. And a leaf of the Bible coming accidentally into the possession of a heathen man has led to there being a congregation of Christians where there were none before.

2. **We should never lose heart in spreading the Gospel,** either in our own country or where missionaries go abroad. The first of these two parables has already been fulfilled. The mustard seed is grown into a tree. When Jesus was speaking, all the believers in His name in the world could have been put into one room perhaps; but now there are millions on millions. Should not this encourage us, and make us feel sure that the other parable will be fulfilled too, and the whole world will be changed? Jesus said, 'The whole was leavened.' And God has promised His Son: 'I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession' (Ps. ii. 8).

XXV.—PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matt. xiii. 44-46

Introduction.—Again for our lesson two parables which may be called twin parables, because they are so like one another, and they teach the same things with only a little difference. In speaking these two parables Jesus, as it were, painted two pictures like one another in subject, like one another in style, like one another even in their frames, and then hung them up on the wall as a pair near one another, to be looked at and studied together.

Read them and see how like they are (vv. 44-46).

I. The first Meaning of the Parables.—The two parables in our last lesson were about very homely and common things—*mustard seed* and *leaven*. The two we have to-day are about very interesting things—*hid treasures* and *pearls*.

1. First let me tell you a few things about finding treasure hid in a field. Sometimes workmen in our own country are fortunate enough to find a jar of old coins as they are digging. It is but rarely, however, and the money found is not much. But in Eastern countries good fortune of this kind is much more frequent, for plain reasons. In these countries wars have been frequent, changes of rulers frequent, subjects have been often plundered, there were no banks to trust money to, property was very insecure, and often the only way to keep money safe was to bury it. It used to be a custom with the rich to divide their money into three parts: one they traded with and lived upon; one they turned into jewels, easily carried with them if they had to flee; and one they buried. I have read of such a family fleeing in seeming poverty; but when the hair of the mother was untied and shaken, jewels of price fell out of it which had been concealed there in their flight. And what of the part of their money buried? It lies waiting their return, and if they die in a foreign land, it lies waiting a finder. When towns are besieged or set upon suddenly the citizens often bury their valuables in field or garden; and so well understood is this practice that soldiers after capturing a city have been known to go watering the plots of ground in it, and if at any spot the water sinks in readily they dig, as the earth may have been recently stirred there in burying treasure. So in those Eastern countries, where the ground has been so often used as a bank, it is reasonable to believe that many treasures lie hid whose first owners have died and taken their secret with them. It has often happened to a peasant, ploughing or digging in a field, to come upon a prize that made him rich on a sudden. Such good fortune a poor man there often hopes for. 'Buried treasure' is often in his mind, and when travellers from our country go to examine the ruins of cities named in the Bible, the ignorant people often suspect they know of some buried treasure, and do all they can to hinder them.

2. About pearls and pearl merchants. Did you ever see a pearl? It is a precious stone, round, smooth, and white, with a changing gleam of colour on it. There is a shell-fish that lives in the Indian ocean which can

be found and brought to the surface only by divers. Their work is very hard, and also (on account of sharks) very dangerous, yet they do it because in this little shell-fish there is sometimes found a small, hard, round thing. This is a pearl. It is found in very few of them; it seems to be due to some hurt, or to a grain of sand getting inside the shell, and then the animal, unable to expel it, begins covering it over with a kind of saliva which hardens over it into a little gleaming gem. These pearls from the Indies are of great value, and in ancient times they were esteemed above all other precious stones. Many thousand pounds were sometimes given for a single pearl. Another thing I must tell you about pearls—*it requires great skill to buy them.* Their value varies so much with slight shades of difference in their shape, their smoothness, and their colour, that buying pearls became almost a separate profession, and men travelled far seeking pearls of the finest shape and water. You see that these parables are about interesting things in their first meaning. They would be very interesting to the men Jesus spoke to, who had often thought of buried treasure, and knew well about pearl merchants.

II. **The second Meaning of the Parables.**—Coming now to the second, or spiritual, meaning of these two parables, we easily see that they tell very encouraging things about the kingdom of heaven, or (as we oftener say) about the Gospel. They answer questions which the people to whom Jesus spoke, and people now too, might incline to ask about the Gospel, and they agree in their answers.

1. One question people might incline to ask is this, **Is the Gospel a good thing to have?** Remember, people do not know about the Gospel, nor what kind of thing it is, until they have it in their own hearts. And before that they are likely to think badly of it. They may hear it often praised, but they are ready to think within themselves that praising it is just a fashion, and that really it is not a good or happy thing, and that it would not be a gain to have it. This leads them to put off seeking it as long as possible. But Jesus in these two parables tells us quite contrary to all this ill opinion of the Gospel. He says it is not only *good*, it is like a *treasure*; it is like *the pearl of great price.* He could not have said anything that would have caused his hearers to think more highly of it.

2. Another question they might incline to ask—**How does a man feel who comes to know the Gospel?**—who finds salvation and eternal life by the Gospel? Jesus in these two parables answers this question twice over in a similar way. In the first parable He answers, As a man feels who finds a treasure, so joyfully; in the second He answers, As a pearl merchant, who has been going from land to land trying to find pearls of fine water, feels when he comes upon one which he sees at a glance to be finer than all he has ever looked upon.

3. Another question they might ask, **How does a man do to make eternal life his own?** Both parables answer this question in harmony, He gives up all he has to get it. But perhaps you say, Is not the Gospel free? Is it not said to be 'without money and without price'? Is not eternal life the free gift of God, and how should the parables speak of selling all to buy, or giving up all to get eternal life? Certainly in many places of the Bible we read that salvation is free; and this seems contrary

to that. But often things *seem* contrary in the Bible and are not. They are not so in practice. When a man has his hands full of stones and rubbish, and you offer him gold and jewels, he has to empty his hands, has he not, in order to take them? So a man who would take the precious gift of eternal life has to put away his own sinful fancies and worldly hopes with which he filled his mind before in order to make room for it. But he does this *with joy* after he has got sight of God's gift. 'For joy thereof,' the parable tells, he sells all he has.

4. Another question they might ask, **Who find the Gospel?** To this the parables give different answers. It is the only difference between them in meaning. They do not contradict one another, but each tells something which is not in the other. The first tells that **some people find eternal life who are not seeking for it,** nor seeking anything very good. The man who found the treasure was not seeking anything of the kind. So 'God is found of them that sought Him not.' This is a great mercy of God. The woman of Samaria is an instance. One day she went out only to draw water, as often before, and that day she found the Saviour (John iv.) Onesimus also (see Philemon). One day a man went to hear an English preacher (Whitfield) with stones in his pockets to throw at him, but God spoke to him by the preacher; he dropped the stones, tears fell from his eyes, and soon he was himself a preacher of Christ (Mr. Tuppen of Bath). The second parable, however, tells us that **some who find eternal life have been seeking that kind of good before.** The pearl merchant, you observe, was *seeking* goodly pearls when he found the pearl of great price. It was the business of his life to find them. So there are noble-minded people, who even from early years incline to noble things, have their hearts set upon better than the pleasures and gains of the world. They are seekers of truth, and wish to have goodness in themselves. God very often reveals His truth to them, even though they have lived long out of reach of the preaching of it. [Cornelius, the centurion, in Acts x. is a Bible example; and still better, the Ethiopian (Acts viii. 26-40). He was a great man in his own country, but came far to learn of the true God and worship in Jerusalem. He was still 'seeking' as he returned—reading Isaiah the prophet. God caused Philip to meet him and preach to him Jesus. This wise seeker of truth at once recognised the pearl of great price and was baptized.]

LESSONS

Believe what these parables tell you—that to have Jesus for your Saviour and Friend is to have a *treasure*,—to have *the pearl of great price*. To many people the Bible and the Church are not interesting; they are like a dull field with dull work to be done in it. But when their eyes are opened they find a treasure in the field which makes the Bible dear and the Church dear ever after. If you do not yet feel Jesus to be so precious to you, pray that your eyes may be opened to see what He is. That is what you need. And do not grudge giving up anything for the sake of Jesus. You get far better in its place. It is always a happy exchange.

XXVI.—STILLING OF THE TEMPEST

Matt. viii. 23-27; Mark iv. 35-41; Luke viii. 22-25

I. **The Evening Voyage.**—You recollect the day in which Jesus first taught the people in parables. He did so sitting in a boat near the edge of the Sea of Galilee. Our lesson now is about that same day. After Jesus had been teaching the people all day, when it was evening, He said to His disciples, 'Let us pass over to the other side.' Read Mark iv. 35, and glance at the two verses before. When Jesus said 'the other side' He meant the other side of the lake. The 'Sea of Galilee,' as it was called, was a lake thirteen miles long by six broad. It was therefore not difficult to row across it, even though they went this time slantwise to the south-east, and not straight across. Jesus seems to have chosen to go to the other side for rest after long preaching. The eastern side was not so thickly peopled, and He would get away from the multitudes that had gathered round Him. Perhaps, too, His enemies made it difficult for Him to use the house in Capernaum—Peter's house, where He had been living before. It was at this time Jesus said, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.' His disciples did as He bade. Read v. 36. 'Even as He was in the boat' means *tired as He was*, and without going for anything but what they had, and in the same boat (perhaps Peter's or John's) which had been His pulpit during the day.

II. **The Tempest.**—In the course of the voyage a great storm of wind came on. In a lake of that size, with mountains round it, gusts of wind blow down on the water, coming through the hollows between the hills; and they come often so quickly and violently as to be very dangerous to boats. A minister who was in the Holy Land lately saw just such a storm on this lake, 'With fierce wind and lashing rain, lasting only a short time, but a hurricane while it continued.' The waves rose so high that they beat into the boat in which Jesus and His disciples were, and it was filling with water. Read v. 39.

III. **Jesus asleep.**—Jesus was asleep. He was weary with the long day; after leaving the shore He lay down in the hinder part of the fishing boat, its rough planks for His bed and 'the cushion' which was in the stern (a usual piece of boat's furniture) for His pillow. Soon He was in so deep sleep that the noise and tossing of the storm did not awake Him. Sleep is a sweet gift of God whether to a child or to a tired man. We might have guessed that Jesus needed rest in sleep, and took it like other men. But it is very interesting to read of His doing so here in the only place in which it happens to be mentioned. As we look at Jesus lying asleep on the cushion in that boat, we feel again how like He was to ourselves, and how truly He became our Brother. He took a man's lot in order to help men; and we may speak to Him now of our tired bodies and know that He will pity us; for He remembers, though in heaven, all He came through on earth.

IV. **The Distress of the Disciples.**—Several of the disciples were fishermen, weather-beaten and accustomed to storms. But in the wild

uproar of this storm, blinded by the rain, unable to row for the wind and like to 'founder' from the filling of the boat with water, they lost their presence of mind. In great alarm they woke Jesus, saying, 'Lord, save us: we perish' (Matt. viii. 25); 'Master, carest Thou not that we perish?' (Mark iv. 38). It is in such hours of danger that men show what they are. (For example, in sieges bravery comes out and tenderness to the weak.) The disciples showed that they were partly believing, partly unbelieving. They believed so in Jesus that they seem never to have thought *He* was in any danger; and their cry, 'Lord, save us!' shows that they still had faith in His power. A great difference they felt between His power and their own helplessness, 'Lord, save us: we perish.' But they might have believed that they were in no danger so long as He was with them. When the great Roman general, Cæsar, was caught in a storm and the boatmen were terrified, he bade them put away their fears. 'You carry Cæsar,' he said, 'and his fortunes,'—as if he were too great a man for a boat with him in it to be wrecked. Well might the disciples of Jesus have felt this with Him in their boat. But they did not; they lost the presence of mind that such faith would have given, and they even began to think He did not care for them since He slept on. Jesus was in a deep sleep just because He had been very tired. How foolish it was of the disciples to chide and blame Him, saying, 'Master, carest Thou not that we perish?'

V. **The Tempest stilled.**—Jesus woke, rose with calmness, and looked forth undisturbed into the darkness and storm, and then, as if the wind and sea were living, as if they had ears to hear His voice, He rebuked them and said two short words, Peace! Still! 'And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.' The wind and waves did not lower gradually, and so die down, but at once a great calm followed the storm (v. 39).

VI. **'They feared exceedingly.'**—Jesus now turned and said to His disciples, 'Why are ye fearful? have ye not yet faith?' (v. 40, Revised Version). He does not remind them that they had accused Him of not caring for them. But the thing He regrets is that they are not growing in faith. They did, however, now grow in faith. Often before this they had looked on while Jesus bade diseases depart and was obeyed; but never before had they seen Him control such powers as the winds and waves. These are utterly beyond control of man. It was a king who taught his courtiers how weak he was by placing his throne on the shore in the way of the advancing waves, and showing how little they stayed their progress for him. But Jesus showed Himself King beyond all earthly kings by what He did in that night voyage across the lake. The disciples believed Him now to be so great that 'they feared exceedingly,' and said, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' (v. 41, Revised Version). Fear mingled with their faith because they felt God near in Jesus.

LESSON

Our life in this world is like a voyage across a sea. The dangers and troubles of life are like storms. And so Christian people have often got great encouragement from reading this story which is your lesson to-day,—about a storm, and how Jesus calmed it. They have got many thoughts to

comfort them out of it. One thing they have learned, and you should now begin to learn, is **not to be afraid in any danger, and not to lose heart in any trouble, if Jesus is with you.** Of course if we go in some path in which we should not go, and in which we cannot have Jesus with us, we may well be afraid. Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, and went away in another direction from that in which God called him to go. No wonder, then, that a storm came upon the ship, and that they were at their wits' end with fear. But if a storm or a calamity comes when we are serving the Lord Jesus (and we know He must be with us then), we need not be afraid. No harm can come to us. He never slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. cxxi.) We will call upon Him; and when it is the fit time He will rebuke the troubles that beset us round, as He did the winds and waves of the sea of Galilee, and they will obey Him. [A young lad was going to Aberdeen to college (long ago) with money in his pocket to keep him during the session. As he was walking by a wood a robber came out of it and took his money from him. He was a lad who had faith in the Lord Jesus. So when the robber was gone, and he did not know whether to go on to Aberdeen and hope to get work there to live by, or to go home till he could get as much money again as would take him to college, he went into a quiet place in the wood to pray the Lord about it. When he rose from his knees the robber came and gave him back his money, and immediately disappeared in the wood again. He had seen the lad from behind a bush as he was praying, and the Lord put it into his heart that he could not take the money from this lad. See how soon Jesus stilled this storm of trouble!] Can anything be too great for Him to do who spoke to the stormy winds and mounting waves, and they were still?

'O Christ, whose voice the waters heard,
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.'

FOR THE TEACHER

It will be best to read this lesson from Mark, which is, as usual, the most vivid in description. The teacher may also keep in mind the more exact translations in the Revised Version: *e.g.* '*the* boat' (v. 36) for '*a* boat,' which shows that it was the boat that had been in use for pulpit during the day, and was perhaps usually at our Lord's service. Also 'was now filling' (v. 37) instead of 'was now full.' 'On *the* cushion' (v. 38) for 'on a pillow'; that is, *the usual cushion in the stern.* 'Why are ye fearful? have ye not yet faith?' (v. 40) instead of 'no faith.' They had some faith, though not faith such as might have been expected. 'Who then is this?' (v. 41) for 'what manner of man is this?'

XXVII.—CURE OF THE GADARENE DEMONIAC

Matt. viii. 28-34; Mark v. 1-20; Luke viii. 26-39

I. **A strange kind of Affliction.**—Our lesson to-day has to do with a kind of affliction of which we believe we have no example nowadays, in our country at least, although it was frequent in the Holy Land when Jesus was seen among men. I have called it an *affliction*; it was not thought to be a *disease*. It had usually symptoms like those of a disease; but they were now of one disease, now of another. One person who suffered under the affliction would be dumb; another would have 'fits' like those which doctors call *epileptic*, in which the person might fall into the fire or into the water (Matt. xvii. 15; Mark ix. 20); another would have violent madness. This affliction seemed to borrow evils from any disease; but nobody reckoned it a disease; without any hesitation they attributed it to an evil spirit in the afflicted person. They spoke of the person as *possessed of a devil*, as *having an unclean spirit*, or as *vexed with a devil*. The idea was that a servant of Satan, some spirit of darkness, had got a lodgment within the man's nature and tyrannised over him, snatching the reins of his being, and driving him often into foul sin or into self-torture.

II. **A very sad Case.**—In Mark (vv. 1-20) (at which you may keep your books open) we read about one of the worst but also most interesting cases of the kind told in the New Testament. It is interesting because the sad particulars of the case are described so clearly,—we can see all that happened almost as if we had been there,—and because the cure of the man was so complete and happy. The case was very sad, and the change was all the more glorious. The sufferer was a man—a man who had a house and friends,—probably a family of his own (v. 19). The manner of his affliction was very like what we now see in cases of violent madness. Read v. 4. 'He had been often bound with fetters.' So, in paroxysms of madness a person has a strength that seems more than human. He wore no clothes (Luke viii. 27). So people out of their mind often incline to strip off their clothes. Read also v. 5. 'Crying, and cutting himself with stones'; so in madness people hurt themselves, even kill themselves. The most shocking thing of all, perhaps, was the place he chose to live in. There were caves in the rocks on the eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee near the city where his house was. In these caves, on shelves cut out of the rock, people buried their dead. This man lived in these same caves, beside the dead; which was peculiarly horrible in the opinion of Jews, whose law made a man unclean if he had touched a dead body even by accident (vv. 3, 5). This man must have been very miserable. It must have been fearful to fight against the horrible delusions that seized him; and worse to be quite overcome by them. Think also what a grief it must have been to his family. If he had a wife and children, how sad they must have felt it that he had left them, that he was living in the tombs, and was the terror of the neighbourhood (Matt. viii. 28)!

III. **Jesus meets and cures the Man.**—The tombs in which this man dwelt were in rocks on the eastern shore of the lake. Early in the morning

after that night-voyage in course of which Jesus stilled the tempest, He and His disciples reached the land near to where those tombs were. As they landed, this wild, naked man was seen running towards Jesus. He had seen Jesus 'from afar,' and seems to have known better than people in an ordinary state of mind who Jesus was. This appears from what he did and from what he said. Instead of doing violence he fell down on his knees before Jesus, touching the ground with his brow in sign of reverence (v. 6). But his speech was not reverent, or it had a mixture of reverence and violence. Jesus took his kneeling posture as a prayer, and was saying, 'Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.' But he cried with a loud voice, and said, 'What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure Thee by God, that Thou torment me not' (vv. 6, 7, 8). The fact seems to be that the man's mind was drawn two ways: that he himself had a wish that Jesus should deliver him, and so he knelt to Jesus; but the evil power immediately drove him to speak its mind, and its fear of Jesus. [Sometimes people out of their mind for a while have not been able to keep from curses when they would have liked to say good things. They had a painful remembrance of this when they got better.] So this man knelt down to Jesus, and yet could not help crying out against Jesus, and almost cursing (vv. 6, 7). Jesus put a simple question to the man, 'What is thy name?' Jesus knew how to treat each case in the best way, and perhaps He put this question to bring the man to himself somewhat, and to take his thoughts back to the days of sound mind when his family was round him and naming him. The *name* would help him to that. But this seemed at first to make things worse. He made a sadly demented answer, which showed that he could not think of his own name, but of the restless evils that had blotted out his memory of himself (v. 9). 'He answered, My name is Legion: for we are many.' *Legion* means *regiment*; a legion was a large Roman regiment. It was a strong way of saying that 'many devils were entered into him' (Luke viii. 30), and the one man's mouth went on beseeching much for the many unclean spirits (v. 10). The thing they greatly feared was that Jesus would send them 'into the deep' (Luke viii. 31), or 'abyss,' what is called in the Book of Revelation 'the bottomless pit.' Within sight of the place there was a herd of about 2000 swine feeding (v. 11). And all the devils besought Jesus to allow them to enter into the swine (v. 12). He allowed them, and immediately there was a great destruction; they left the man, but in their delight in evil they destroyed even the animals which they had got leave to shelter in. Read v. 13. Why did Jesus allow this? He did everything as it was best for the man. And the man would feel far more sure that he had got rid of the evil spirits that tormented him when he saw that they had gone into the herd of swine and driven it to madness.

IV. **What the People of the Country did.**—The swineherds hurried off and told what had happened in the city and in the country (v. 14), and the people of the district soon came flocking to Jesus, and saw a fine sight —the man out of whom the devils were cast sitting, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus (vv. 14, 15; Luke viii. 35). The man who had been so horrible in his ways was all changed. His place at the feet of Jesus shows *he was grateful* to Him and ready to obey Him as his

Master. The change was like what happens nowadays when a naked savage is converted to Christ, and changes all his habits to those of a civilised man and a Christian. Were the people of the country glad when they saw this? Strange to say, they were not. They were more afraid than glad. The change upon the man was more than they cared for, and when they were told about the swine, they actually began to pray Jesus to go away from their country (vv. 16, 17). They were unanimous about this (Luke viii. 37). They were more troubled that swine had been lost than that a man had been delivered from slavery to Satan and raised into companionship with Jesus. And Jesus did as they asked; He went.

V. **What the cured Man did.**—When Jesus was entering the boat to depart, the man who had been cured prayed to be allowed to go with Him. He loved Jesus much for what He had done, and felt it would be happy to be with Him; perhaps he felt as if he would be safer from any return of his affliction if with Jesus (v. 18). But Jesus did not allow him. He saw that this would not be the man's duty nor the best thing for him. Our duty begins at home and among our friends. And we are never so safe or so happy, even though we are doing good things, if we are forgetting our first and home duties. See what Jesus bade him do (v. 19). This was the way for him to do most good, to tell about Jesus to the people who knew what he had been and could see the change in him. If any preaching would make them believers in Jesus, it would be this man's tale of what had been done to him and who did it. The man obeyed, and went through the whole country of Decapolis, which had ten cities in it, telling of Jesus. Read v. 20.

LESSONS

1. We learn from this story that there is **hope in hopeless cases** if they are brought to Jesus. How hopeless this man's case was! He could do nothing for himself, and chains and fetters were of no use for him. But in an hour after he fell at Jesus' feet he was a changed man and began a noble life. If anybody feels hopeless because of any sin, he should do as this man did—come to the feet of Jesus. He should ask Jesus to deliver him from his sin.

'Thy touch has still its ancient power;
No word from Thee can fruitless fall.'

2. Another lesson from this story. **The saving of a man is worth any expense and any trouble.** The people here thought that the cure of the man cost too much when their swine were dead. Jesus evidently thought that of no account if it had helped to raise a man. So too, if we labour long and hard for the good of men, we shall feel it was well worth while if even one soul is brought from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan to God.

XXVIII.—JOHN THE BAPTIST PUT TO DEATH

Mark vi. 17-29

Introduction.—Our lesson to-day is about the death of John the Baptist. You recollect about his birth,—about the old father and mother, Zacharias and Elisabeth, who were so glad to receive him from God, and to know that he was to prepare the way of the Lord (Lesson I.) You recollect his upbringing—*in the deserts*, and his preaching—*in the wilderness*, to which the people flocked in multitudes to hear him, and be baptized by him. He was very stern in bidding people repent of their sins, but he was also very humble and unselfish. When Jesus came, John said he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose His shoe-latchet (Lesson VI.) So noble a servant of God was he that Jesus declared, 'Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist' (Matt. xi. 11). For thousands of years the world had had great men and heroes, but never one greater than he. Was not this high praise from Jesus? Now we are to read how he died.

I. **John imprisoned by Herod.**—John preached about six months before Jesus, preparing the way for Him, and about another six months after Jesus appeared, witnessing to Him; then his work came to an end. He was put in prison. This is how it came about. Over Galilee ruled at this time a king called Herod, a son of the Herod who sought to destroy the child Jesus. Herod was not a good man, and had put away his own wife, and was living with a woman who was the wife of one of his own brothers. (Her name was Herodias.) Nobody ventured to speak to him of his sin, not even the priests. But John the Baptist did. He told him it was against God's law, and should be given up (v. 18). Herod knew that this was true, and it made him afraid; he did not, however, give it up. A great hatred to John sprang up in the heart of Herodias, because he had said the truth about her. She wished to kill him. She pressed Herod to do this; and he yielded to her so far as to send men to lay hold on John and put him in prison, but he would not kill him; he was too much afraid of John for that, 'knowing him to be a just man and an holy.' He did not want to have more guilt upon him by putting this servant of God to death. Read vv. 17-20.

You see, Herod was 'halting between two opinions.' He allowed himself to do wrong things, and it was very wrong to yield to Herodias so far as to put God's servant in prison for speaking what he knew to be the truth. But he was not so daringly wicked as Herodias; he was too much afraid to kill John, and he 'kept him safe' from her.

We know where John was imprisoned. Herod had a great fortress on the east side of the Dead Sea, covering the top of a hill, and called Machærus, and also 'The Diadem.' There was a palace inside it, and in caves below there were dungeons. John was put there. We know also a little of how he spent his time in prison. It must have been very dreary for John, who had been accustomed to be free in the wilderness, and to speak to men mightily for God. His disciples, however, were

allowed to visit him. Once when he was much cast down he sent them with a message to Jesus, and got a message from Him in return (Matt. xi. 1-6), which probably cheered him much. Sometimes, it seems, Herod sent for him to hear him, and then after hearing him 'he was much perplexed.' We do not wonder at that, for John would tell him the truth, and make him greatly wish that he had resolution to do it. But we do wonder to read that 'he heard him gladly' (see end of v. 20). How could a man of Herod's character like to hear John preach? Perhaps Herod admired the noble words, as people do who like to hear fine sermons and yet do not get good from them, because they cannot make up their minds to do what they hear.

II. **Herod's Birthday Feast.**—Month after month passed, and John was still in prison, when a day came round which Herod always kept with great feasting—his own birthday. The feast this time was in that proud castle of Machærus, in whose dungeon John was lying. There was a great company at it—Herod's lords, the high captains of his army, and the chief men of Galilee. Such feasts of Herod were splendidly lighted with lamps, the rooms adorned with flowers, and there was abundance of wine. Only men were present; it was not the custom for women to be at feasts with men. But when this feast had gone on for a while, the daughter of Herodias came in and danced before Herod and his guests. The dancing was a sort of acting as well as dancing, and no good woman would have come in and danced that kind of dance at a feast where there were only men, and many of them probably affected with drink. It was a shame in her mother to send her daughter in to behave as she did. But Herod and his guests were pleased. They applauded her greatly, and Herod, who was a vain man, and wanted to appear grand and generous before his company, bade her ask anything she liked and he would give it her. He swore too, and said he would give her whatever she asked up to half of his kingdom. For all that, he did not mean so much. He could not give away any of his kingdom without leave of the Roman Emperor who gave it him. But he was swaggering, as vain men do, especially when flushed with wine. He expected perhaps that she would ask a jewel, or a bracelet, or a palace, or the revenue of a city at the most. But when she heard Herod put so much in her power, she went out and consulted her mother what to ask. Her mother did not hesitate a moment. She had planned it all. She had been waiting for this as a fit or 'convenient' day (v. 21). She knew Herod, and expected in this very way to get him to do for vanity and vainglory a thing more wicked than he himself inclined to. Herodias bade her daughter ask for *the head of John the Baptist* (v. 24). It was an awful request, and see how the daughter spoke it when she went back to the hall of the feast—'I will that thou forthwith give me here on a salver the head of John the Baptist' (vv. 24, 25).

Herod was 'exceeding sorry.' All the pleasure had gone from that feast for him. If he had been a righteous man he would have said, 'No! that is more than I promised: to do that great sin against God is more than half of my kingdom.' But Herod was one of those men who do from shame before men worse things than they incline to themselves. He was afraid of his guests saying he had broken his word and his oaths. He feared man more than God (v. 26).

III. **The Death of John.**—Then Herod did the deed from which he shrank so much himself. It took only a motion of his hand to one of his bodyguard and a word of command. How easily a great sin may be done!

John, you remember, was alone in the dungeon below the castle. What was he doing this night? Was he meditating on the word of God that came to him in the wilderness, on the work he had done, the multitudes he had baptized, and the Christ he had borne witness to? Did he hear now and then a sound of the feasting that was going on above, or see a gleam of its light? Suddenly there came a sound of armed feet; the door was opened; a soldier entered. What did he come for? No time was given the captive to consider. Death without a warning followed. The soldier 'beheaded him in the prison,' went back to the hall where the damsel waited, and gave her the bloody head, as she asked, on a salver. Did she shudder at it? Did she cry out in horror at such a sight? No: she took it to her mother, whose heart, hungry with hatred, rejoiced at the sight. Read vv. 27, 28.

Soon his disciples heard of it, came and took the headless body and lovingly buried it (v. 29). Then they went and told Jesus (Matt. xiv. 12). None like Him to speak to of such a thing! He would tell them their master was now with God.

LESSONS

1. Take warning: **learn how great wickedness people may come to do without intending it.** You children do not intend to do great sin, and when people have done great sin, they make excuse, and say they did not mean it; they were tempted; it was against their will. They seem to think they are not to blame unless they meant it. But Herod did not *mean* to kill John; and he had the excuse of his oaths, and the company. Yet he was guilty of giving the head of one of God's greatest servants as a fee, or prize, for an immodest dance. Take warning: you may do wickedly though you do not *mean* it. It is not enough not to *mean* to do what is bad. Live to do good. **'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.'**

2. Learn from John the Baptist **what a noble life is.** It may not be a long life. He was only thirty-two when he died. It may not have riches or good things. His clothing was of camel's hair, his food locusts and wild honey, and he died in a dungeon. But he pleased God; he did God's will; he did the work God called him to; he was faithful unto death; his death was precious in God's sight (Ps. cxvi. 15); and the reward God gave him was better than could be given him in this world. He was taken to be with God to get it.

FOR THE TEACHER

Some points in this lesson are again drawn from the Revised Version: 'kept him safe' for 'observed him,' and 'was much perplexed' for 'did many things' in v. 20; 'forthwith' for 'by and by' in v. 25; 'oaths' for the singular in v. 26; 'soldier of his guard' for 'executioner' in v. 27. Let more or less of the details and lessons be given according to the capacity of the children.

XXIX.—JESUS SENDS THE APOSTLES ON A MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Matt. x. 5-42

Introduction.—You remember that Jesus chose twelve men to be always with Him, to be learning so that they might preach where He could not go Himself, and might be missionaries after He was gone to heaven. (Lesson XIII. Ask some of their names.) Jesus took great care in preparing them for this. To-day we are to read what He said to them the first time He sent them to preach by themselves. It was their first preaching journey without Jesus; so He gave them very clear directions.

I. **Jesus' Directions for the Journey.**—1. First He told them *where* to go. Read vv. 5, 6. You see in this journey they were only to preach to Jews. The Jews had great need; they were like 'lost sheep' (ix. 36); and, besides, the Apostles were not fit yet to preach to Samaritans or to Gentiles. They had not learned enough yet. So this would not be a long journey; perhaps only of a few days; but in that time, going by two and two (for they were sent in twos to cheer one another, Mark vi. 7), they might get through a good many towns and villages.

2. He told them *what to say* (v. 7), and *great things they were to do* (v. 8). Their work was to be preaching and healing. Missionaries nowadays also like to do sick people good, and some of them learn to be doctors in order to heal the sick in countries where they preach. But could they do like this? Could they cleanse the lepers or raise the dead? On this journey the Apostles could not preach so good news as our missionaries now, who can tell that the kingdom of heaven has begun; but they got from Jesus wonderful power to take away troubles and to heal.

3. He told them about their *outfit* for this journey (vv. 9, 10). They were to go just as they were, not providing extra *money* (observe 'neither gold, nor silver, nor even *copper*'; brass here is *bronze*), nor *food* (scrip = a wallet, such as Jews in travelling usually carried slung over the shoulder with food in it), nor spare *clothing*, nor to provide even a *staff* if they had not one. Jesus wished His Apostles to be free of all care about earthly things; so He began in this way to practise them in trusting to God for what they needed. Besides, people in that country still need very little with them for a short journey.

4. He told them *how to proceed* at each city or village. The first thing on entering was to get a lodging by asking for some good, kind family, and if taken in by them, to stay there till they left the place (v. 11). Next, in going into any house they were to be courteous, and give the usual salutation, 'Peace be to this house' (v. 12). They were not to make a difference between bad and good, but say 'Peace' to all, and let them get good by it or not according to the way in which they took it (v. 13). And if any would not welcome them, and would not take in what they said about the kingdom of heaven, they were, when they left, to shake off the dust of their feet. This meant that they would not take any share with these people in the blame of their behaviour (v. 14). And Jesus added very solemn words

telling how great this blame would be. He said that it would not be so bad in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah (the awfully wicked cities which God destroyed by fire and brimstone) as it would be for a city or a family that refused the messengers of Jesus (v. 15). (Why this? Because the cities the Apostles were going to now were having much better opportunities than Sodom and Gomorrah had.) It was good for the Apostles to know this, which is told in v. 15, in order that they might feel the work they were going to do a very great work, whether people heeded them or not. These were the directions which Jesus gave for **this first missionary journey** on which He sent His Apostles. They are very complete. [Recall them in their order, as now given.]

II. **Directions for other Missionary Journeys** (vv. 16-23).—Jesus thought that He had said enough about this first missionary journey. But he also prepared them for the **other missionary journeys** they would make after He was gone into heaven. He prepared them for these in an extraordinary manner—chiefly by telling them beforehand that men would oppose them very much, and bring many sufferings upon them. It was better they should know this beforehand. They might be expecting that if they went to preach good news and to do people good, they would be welcomed and praised by everybody. And if Jesus had let them go with this expectation they might have been so disheartened by unkindness as to give up their work. It was well they should know the worst beforehand, and when it came, feel it was just what Jesus bade them count upon. He said they would be like sheep in the midst of wolves (v. 16); that they would be persecuted by Jews (v. 17), tried by their courts as criminals and whipped; that they would be persecuted by Gentiles (v. 18), having to answer for Jesus before Gentile governors and kings; that they would find people betray one another (v. 21), and that they would be hated by all men for His name's sake (v. 22). See how well Jesus knew how His servants would be received, and how plainly He told them beforehand. But you will see that He also gave them *advice* (vv. 16-23), and that He gave them great *encouragement*. **'I send you forth'** (v. 16)—that was encouragement. It was great encouragement also that when they were tried before any of these judges or kings **God would be with them**, and give them from Himself the very thing to say (vv. 19, 20). This too was great encouragement—**'he that endureth to the end shall be saved'** (v. 22).

III. **Directions for all the Disciples and Servants of Jesus.**—Jesus did not stop yet. He had advised and prepared and encouraged these twelve Apostles for the work they were to do in their lifetime. But He went on to **advise and prepare and encourage all His disciples and servants who should ever be in the world.** That includes us, and all true Christian men and women and children now. So this last part of the discourse is more for us than any part of it. And we may be glad of this; for though it tells us too that we must expect to be called bad names for the sake of Jesus, and should not complain, for men called Him bad names too (vv. 24, 25), yet there are very precious advices and very encouraging promises here. How good advice that is in v. 28! **We should never be cowardly before men if we feared to offend God.** What a comfortable thing that is we read in vv. 29, 30, 31! How close round us our Heavenly Father's care is, and how great it is, if He

gives thought to the life of every single sparrow; and **each of us is of more value to Him than many sparrows!** Our Heavenly Father knows all about us, and thinks more and cares more for us than we could do ourselves; for which of us could keep count of the hairs of our head? **We should never be afraid if we knew how much our Father cares for us.** Another great encouragement Jesus gives here is **the certainty of a reward in heaven for everything we do to serve Him.** In the last verses (41, 42) He tells that there will be a heavenly reward for things so small that **even a child** can do them. We may not be able to preach, but we can welcome a preacher whom God sends, and take his side in our heart, and perhaps do something that will be a help to him. If we do that we shall receive a reward from God. Jesus indeed tells us we shall receive the *same kind of reward* as if we had preached ourselves. We have had a share with him in his work, and we shall have a share in the reward. (Read v. 41, first half, explaining that *prophet* here is just a preacher sent by God.) So too if we help a righteous man, and take part with him because he is a righteous man, we shall have a reward from God like his (v. 41, second half). And if we show any kindness to one of Christ's disciples (whom he calls here lovingly His 'little ones') because they belong to Him,—even so small a kindness as giving a cup of cold water,—Jesus solemnly declares that we shall be certainly rewarded in heaven. **'Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water . . . shall in no wise lose his reward'** (v. 42).

LESSONS

1. The Lord Jesus knows intimately all His disciples—men, women, and children—even every single *one* of them (v. 42).

2. He is so interested in everything that happens to them that a kindness to one of them He feels a kindness to Himself (vv. 40-42).

3. God will reward the humblest helper in any good work (v. 42). For example, God will reward not only Livingstone and other missionaries who have gone abroad, but everybody at home who helped them, and even those whose kind words cheered them, and were like a cup of cold water when they were thirsty.

'Little drops of kindness,
Little words of love,
Make our world an Eden
Like the heaven above.'

XXX.—CURE OF THE ISSUE OF BLOOD

Matt. ix. 20-22; Mark v. 25-34; Luke viii. 43-48

I. **A Crowd about Jesus.**—Jesus was beside the Lake of Galilee and there was a great crowd of people round Him. The day before, He had spoken the parables from the boat; that morning on the east side of the lake He had cured the man possessed with devils, and as the people there wished Him to go away, He had come back from them. Perhaps the crowd round Him now were expecting more parables. But there came a man to Jesus, whose name was Jairus, a 'ruler of the synagogue,' who, though he was so important a man, fell down at the feet of Jesus before all the people that were there. What made him do that? He was exceedingly anxious about his little daughter who was so ill: they were just expecting her to die, and he entreated Jesus to come to his house and heal her. He was anxious that Jesus should make haste for fear she should die before they came. So Jesus went with him, and the people too in a great throng about Jesus, wondering whether He would be able to cure a person who was so near death (Mark v. 21-24).

II. **A Woman in the Crowd.**—In this crowd was a woman whom I must describe to you, because our lesson is about her. She was ill of an 'issue of blood'—that is, a bleeding that would not stop. She had had it for twelve years. In the course of that time she had gone to many doctors; she had suffered much pain in trying their cures; she had spent all her living upon them, so that instead of a rich woman she was now poor, and still she was no better, but rather grew worse. After so long illness, and so many disappointments, and with poverty to make her anxious about the future, she would be a thin, wasted, depressed woman. She would feel lonely too, for long sickness makes people feel cut off from others; and she would not even get to church with other people, for her kind of illness was counted unclean and shut out any one then from the synagogue. This would make her feel as if God had forsaken her, and her illness seemed to mean that He was displeased with her. Read Mark v. 25, 26.

III. **She steals a Cure from Jesus.**—You can believe that when this woman heard people telling how Jesus healed diseases, she listened. Perhaps the first time she heard it she did not listen much. She had been so often disappointed she would not be ready to believe He could do her any good. But again and again she heard of Jesus healing—palsy, fever, leprosy; and by the time we read of here, she had come to believe that there was such healing power in Jesus that if she even touched His clothes that power would come into her and heal her. She thought she could get cured in this way without ever Jesus knowing. So she took the opportunity of this crowd pressing round Jesus; she thought her touching Him now would not be noticed. To make sure she came *behind* in the crowd, put out her thin wasted hand and touched the upper garment which Jesus wore as other people did then, a garment like a plaid or loose cloak, and the moment she touched it she felt in her body that she was healed of her long illness (vv. 27, 29). What a happy feeling she must have had!

IV. **Jesus obliges her to confess.**—But Jesus knew. He knew immediately that power had gone out of Him, and He turned round and said, 'Who touched My clothes?' (v. 30). His disciples thought it very strange He should ask this, for many people were touching Him; the crowd was so great and so close that they could not help it. Read what His disciples said (v. 31). But Jesus still looked round and waited for an answer (v. 32). The woman knew that He meant her. See what she did (v. 33)—'came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth.' Read the gracious words with which Jesus answered her (v. 34).

V. **Why Jesus obliged her to confess.**—Why now did Jesus halt in this way and oblige her to tell about her cure? Jairus would think it a waste of time and be impatient of the delay when they were hastening to his dying daughter. Besides, Jesus often forbade people to tell of their cures. He said, 'See thou tell no man' (Mark v. 46; vii. 39; Matt. viii. 4). Why did He oblige this woman to tell hers? Was He displeased with her for taking it secretly? Did He count it a theft? No, indeed! It was not stealing of a bad kind. Jesus was pleased with her for it. She took just what He wanted to give. But He stopped her with His question **because He wanted to give her more.** He would not let her go with half a blessing. She had got one half: she must wait to get the rest. Her body was healed, but Jesus wished her to get good in her mind and heart and soul. He gave her this by stopping her and speaking to her. Let me show you how He did it.

1. She was very ignorant about Him and very mistaken. She evidently thought that cures were got from Him without His knowing—that there was a power like magic in Jesus (or even like electricity), that came out from His body and cured without His thinking. She thought it would even come through His clothes. So she said in herself, 'If I may but touch His clothes I shall be whole.' Would it not have been a pity that she should go away in such ignorance? But when Jesus stopped her and spoke to her she found that His cures came from His *love*. So this woman, who came believing only in the *power* of Jesus, went believing in His *love*. **She knew the love of Jesus.** Was not this a blessing worth waiting for? Was it not wise and kind in Jesus to add this blessing in her soul to what she had got in her body?

2. Another good thing Jesus gave her—**peace.** What kind words these were He sent her away with—'Daughter, go in peace, and be whole of thy plague'! He never (that we read of) called any one else *Daughter*. It was very kind of Jesus to speak to her so. She was a shy, trembling, lonely woman. Even after she was cured she was not sure whether Jesus might not be displeased with her for the way in which she had taken her cure. It was in fear and trembling that she told Him all the truth (v. 33). But when Jesus called her *Daughter*, that would put away all her fears; she would often remember that kind word afterwards and love Him for it; and when He said, 'Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague,' this would take away all her old fears that God was displeased with her, and any fear that her illness might return. Was it not well for her that Jesus kept her waiting? Did He not add to the blessing she got in her body?

3. Another good thing Jesus did, both to the woman and to all the

people by stopping her and questioning her. He taught them **how good a thing it is to have faith in Him.** The woman learned that it was not the touch of her hand (as she thought) that got the healing for her, but the faith of her heart. 'Thy *faith* hath made thee whole,' Jesus said to her (v. 34). And the people learned that nobody gets any good by coming near to Jesus, or even touching Him, unless it be with faith. Many were touching Jesus in that crowd, but only this woman who touched Him with faith got a blessing.

LESSONS

1. We learn from this story something about congregations and about going to church. Jesus, you know, is present in the congregation. We do not see Him; but He says, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. xviii. 20). So it is very good to be in church when people are met together in Jesus' name. A crowd of people in church is like that crowd round Jesus which we have been reading of. But among all the people who are there, who get good? *Those who come near to Jesus with faith in their hearts.* So we see from the story of this crowd and this woman. *Only they get good*: but every one of them does. Even if there be only one person in all the congregation, a man, a woman, or a child, who is coming near to Jesus in faith and asking from Him with faith in the heart, He will notice and bless that one just as He did this one woman we read of. So we learn that **the way to get a blessing in church is to draw near to Jesus with faith in our heart.**

2. Another lesson we learn is that **Jesus will give us a blessing even though our faith in Him is not so good as it should be.** This woman's faith had great faults. It was ignorant faith: she did not know the love of Jesus. It was superstitious faith: she thought His power to be like magic. But Jesus gave her the blessing she wished; and He is the same in His kind dealing now (Heb. xiii. 8). He hears every prayer even of feeble and ignorant faith. Sometimes you have been amused at the prayers of your younger brothers and sisters. They have made mistakes in asking. But Jesus heard them, if they had trust in Him.

XXXI.

RAISING FROM THE DEAD OF THE WIDOW'S SON AT NAIN. RAISING FROM THE DEAD OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

Luke vii. 11-17; Matt. ix. 18, 19, 23-26; Mark v. 22-24, 35-43; Luke viii. 41, 42, 49-56

Introduction.—You children all know something of death. Some of you perhaps have known it happen in your own home. Perhaps one of you is an orphan. Your father or mother died. Or if not that, a brother or a sister. There was sore illness: then, in spite of all that could be done, death came. The eyes were closed for the last time. It was like sleep, but life was gone, only the body was left: the spirit had departed, and the body had soon to be buried out of sight. And you know that once the life has gone out of the body no power of man can bring it back. When the Arabs hear of our great inventions and the wonderful things clever men in our country can do, they ask sometimes, Can they bring back the dead to life? They ask this to humble us; they know we cannot, nor can any man. But three times, when He was among men, Jesus did this, and our lesson to-day is about two of these mighty works.

I. **The Raising of the only Son.**—One day Jesus set out on a journey. His disciples went with Him and a great company of people. The road He took was towards the south, and after they had gone many miles they were ascending a steep hill, toward a village called Nain. It was a village lying on the bare slope of a rugged and barren range of hills; it looked to the north; it was surrounded by a wall, having a single gate, on the northern or lower side. Toward this gate Jesus and His company were now coming up, and there, just outside it, they met a funeral. Different countries have different customs at funerals. Theirs were different from ours. For example, (1) it was their custom to bury the dead *outside the walls*—only kings were buried inside (1 Kings ii. 10; xvi. 28). Outside this village are still to be seen the caves they buried in, to which this funeral was now on its way. (2) Women went with the body to the grave, as in England, though not usually in Scotland. (3) They did not put the body in a coffin: they wrapped it in linen cloths and carried it on an open 'bier' (a wooden frame).

This was a very sad funeral that was coming out of Nain. It was a young man who was dead; his mother was a widow and he was her only son. You see this was not the first funeral from her house. She had buried her husband before. Having one son she had brought him up, hoping that he would be, what a widow's son should be proud to be, a great comfort to his mother. Now she was burying him too, and she would be left alone. 'Much people of the city was with her,' they felt her case very sad, and wished to show their sympathy for her (Luke vii. 11, 12).

So the two companies, the company with Jesus and the funeral company, met just outside the gate. When Jesus saw the woman He had compassion on her and said, 'Weep not' (v. 13). Perhaps she did not heed much: she would not know how great was the compassion of Jesus, nor what He could

do. But Jesus 'came nigh and touched the bier' (v. 14). The men who were carrying stood still: they felt they must, and that Jesus meant something. For a moment all stood still and quiet; then the voice of Jesus was heard, **'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.'** Immediately there was a movement among the clothes on the bier. 'He that was dead sat up, and' (giving another sign of life) 'began to speak' (v. 15). And Jesus gave him to his mother. How glad she would be! All the grief she had had about his death would make her the more glad now. And it was a great pleasure to Jesus to make her so happy. How did the people feel who saw this? They were almost frightened, no doubt, to see a dead man coming to life. But they remembered how the old prophets Elijah and Elisha had raised the dead (1 Kings xvii. 19-22; 2 Kings iv. 32-35), though with much effort; so they thanked God for sending again a great prophet. They felt that God had been kind in sending Jesus, who could raise the dead at a word. God had been kinder than they knew: for Jesus was the Son of God.

II. **The Raising of the only Daughter.**—The other raising of the dead we are to read about (turn to Mark v. 35) was just after the healing of the woman in our last Sunday's lesson. You remember that Jesus, when He healed her, was on the way, with a crowd thronging about Him, to heal the little daughter of Jairus, who was at the point of death. Jesus stopped, you remember, to talk with the woman. Before ever He began to go on again, **news came from the house that the little girl was dead.** Read v. 35. Her father would be like to say, with bitterness in his heart, Oh that Jesus had not wasted time speaking to this woman; death has got before us in the race; it is of no use now to bring Jesus. But Jesus did not give him time to lose heart in this way. He said to him 'Fear not, only believe' (v. 36). So they went on: but Jesus did not allow the crowd to go farther. Only three even of His disciples (Peter, James, and John) did He count worthy to go with Him into this house and see the great thing He was to do (v. 37). It was not for inquisitive, talkative people to be present at, but only for the best people. In the house itself, when He reached it, Jesus found people making ready for the funeral with a great noise. Funerals there take place within a few hours of the death. And a strange custom at their funerals (not mentioned in this lesson before) was to have people at them who made it a trade to weep aloud at funerals. These people made a great noise, put dust on their heads, played sad music on flutes, showed all signs of mourning, and were paid wages for this. At Jairus' house, when Jesus came, these hired mourners were already raising the funeral wail (v. 38), and playing the funeral music (Matt. ix. 23). Jesus spoke to quiet them. 'Why make ye a tumult, and weep? the child is not dead, but sleepeth.' Her death was just a sleep to Him; for He would soon make her alive again (v. 39), and He did not wish these people to make the girl's father lose heart and lose faith. They laughed and mocked at what Jesus said; it was heartless of them to be laughing in that house, but they were only hired mourners, and they thought Jesus meant that they did not know their trade, did not know death when they saw it. So Jesus put them all out, took only the father and mother and His three disciples with Him, and, now that the house was all quiet, went in where the girl was lying (v. 40). **See Jesus in the chamber of death.** See Him come and stand beside the child that lay so

still. He took her by the hand and spoke to her. What He said to her was, '**Maiden, rise up**' (v. 41). It was like what He said to the young man on the bier. But, do you notice, the very words are given in the very language He spoke, 'Talitha cumi.' Two languages were spoken in that country; but this was the language used among children. Jesus suited Himself to the child; the words were so kind and the effect of them so wonderful, that we have them told us here exactly as they passed His lips. **He spoke to her as gently, and in just such words as her mother would have used in calling her to awake in the morning.** Immediately the little girl moved and rose, and walked about; for she was old enough to walk—much more than that, twelve years old—it was only sickness and death that had hindered her (v. 42). Who were in the room at the time? See how astonished they were (v. 42). One thing He *forbade* them to do—to tell what had been done. It would not be good for the girl to be much talked about, and it would not be good for her parents; they might forget to thank God if they talked to strangers much about it; they might even be tempted to boast of what had happened, and be proud of it instead of happy and thankful. Another thing Jesus *bade* them do—give the girl some food. They were all so astonished that they forgot she would now be hungry after wanting food long in her illness. Jesus was the first to think of the child's hunger.

LESSONS

1. **Jesus is compassionate and kind.**—Some people are very righteous, but not compassionate or kind, and some children think Jesus is like that, and so they are rather afraid of Him. But they are quite mistaken. It is a pity they should think so; for Jesus is full of compassion. It was this which made Him do these great works. He did not raise these two from the dead to show His power. In fact He wished the girl's parents not to speak of it. It was because His heart was so grieved for people who had lost *an only son* and *an only daughter*. And as the mother of the only son was also a *widow*, He did not even wait to be asked to raise her son. He was moved to do it at once to comfort her. And Jesus is kind too *about little things* as well as about great sorrows. How kind was His hand and His voice when He raised up the little girl, and the words He spoke to her in the children's language! Is not Jesus a person you could quite trust yourselves to?

2. **Jesus is mighty in power.**—It is a happy thing that so kind a person should have such power, and who but Jesus could have raised these two from death? And He has promised to raise from their graves all who believe in Him at the last day, in a joyful resurrection, and then He will give back sons to mothers, and children to parents who lost them, and orphan children will get their parents back again, and they will be happier together than even this widow and her son, or Jairus and his little daughter, because they will know that they will never part again, or die any more (John vi. 40).

XXXII.—FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

Matt. xiv. 13-21; Mark vi. 30-44; Luke ix. 10-17; John vi. 1-14

I. **Jesus and His Disciples go away for Rest.**—You remember the first missionary journey on which Jesus sent His Apostles (Lesson XXIX.) It was not to a great distance, nor for many days that they were away; but as it was the first time they had been preaching by themselves you may be sure they would be anxious about it, and when they came back they would have much to tell Him. Our lesson to-day begins just when they had come back. Read Mark vi. 30. 'And the Apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus.' That is just what we would expect. By two and two as they went forth, so they returned and gathered round Him, and to a Master who was so wise and so kind they told everything that had happened, especially what they had done and what they had taught, to see if He thought they had been right, and to have the pleasure of His praise. Perhaps their circuit among so many villages and towns had brought more people than usual to hear Jesus: anyhow at this time He and His disciples were kept so busy with people coming and going that they had hardly time to eat. Jesus saw that they needed rest; this made Him feel very tenderly to them, and He planned a kind thing for them,—a rest in a quiet place, away from towns, where they would be alone. 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while,' He said (v. 31). So they got into the boat (the same boat that He preached the parables from—the boat that was at His service always), and sailed across the Lake of Galilee to the east side of it—not to the country of the Gadarenes (Lesson XXVII.), but to a region farther north, far away from towns and villages, where there were only mountains and grassy places along the lake side. There they expected to be alone (v. 32; John vi. 1; Matt. xiv. 13).

II. **Their Rest is interrupted.**—But the people saw them go; the news of their going spread, and there was such a desire to see more miracles done by Jesus (John vi. 2) that multitudes determined to follow Him. But how could such crowds get boats enough to cross the lake? They did not need them. The north end of the lake was not far off; they ran round it on foot, and so quickly (or perhaps the wind was contrary to the boat), that when Jesus and His disciples landed, instead of a quiet place they found a great multitude of people from all the cities round about (v. 33).

III. **Jesus has Compassion on the People and teaches them.**—Jesus had gone for rest and quiet. Was He disappointed and angry when He saw the multitudes? Did He say, We wished some quiet, and they might have let us have it? No! **He had compassion on them**, and He welcomed them (Luke ix. 11). A great crowd of people was a sight that touched the heart of Jesus with compassion. This crowd He thought like a flock of sheep without a shepherd to guide them to right pasture or to save them from wild beasts. The men who should have been shepherds to these people's souls—the priests and scribes—left them to their own foolish wandering fancies, and did not defend them from the sins and superstitions that were like wild beasts to devour their souls. So Jesus pitied them, and instead of being provoked by their following Him, He welcomed them, 'began to teach

them many things,' and to heal their sick (Matt. xiv. 14). Read Mark vi. 34. Jesus was sitting on a green hillside teaching them. Do you remember a sermon He preached on a mountain once before (Lesson XIV.)? This time He taught them more about the same subject—'the kingdom of God' (Luke ix. 11). We are not told what He said, but it was a subject they greatly needed to be taught about, because they were much mistaken in their thoughts of it, and He taught them for a long time.

IV. Jesus has Compassion on the People and feeds them.—So the day wore away. The evening was coming on. The shadows would be lengthening. Jesus' disciples came to Him with a proposal. See what it was. Read Mark vi. 35, 36. Perhaps the disciples were thinking: Jesus is so much taken up with teaching, He is thinking so much of these people's souls, that He is forgetting their bodies and forgetting that they must be hungry; He is speaking too long; we must get Him to stop and send them away, or soon it will be too dark for them to find their way to houses and shops. Was Jesus forgetting? No! He had thought about the hungry people, and He knew what He would do. What the Apostles proposed might be 'common sense,' but the ways of Jesus are far higher than that. So He surprised His disciples much by saying, 'They need not go away; give ye them to eat' (Matt. xiv. 16). They felt that impossible. It would take two hundred pennyworth of bread. Read v. 37. It was Philip, a frank disciple, who was in the way of speaking out what he thought to Jesus very simply, who made this calculation (John vi. 7). [The coin called here a *penny* was silver; was the ordinary day's wage of a labourer, and would have bought as much bread as half a crown now. So Philip's guess at what would be needed was as if he had said, Twenty-five pounds would be needed to buy only a little bread for each person of this multitude. And such a sum they had not.] Jesus spoke to His disciples as He did now 'to prove them' (John vi. 6). **He wished them to get a lesson by what He was going to do.** He wished them to feel their helplessness first before He would do a mighty work of help, and in future years when they again felt themselves helpless they would remember this and turn to Him for help.

He asked them next, 'How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes' (v. 38). It was Andrew who gave this answer, another disciple who could speak freely to Jesus; the loaves were of barley—very plain bread, and this little provision of bread and fish belonged to a young lad who was there (John vi. 8, 9). You know that five loaves and two small fishes would not feed the children in this school. 'What are these among so many?' said Andrew to Jesus, when he counted what they had and looked at the crowds of people. Now Jesus began to do what He intended. His help is given usually when people have found out their own helplessness. He bade His disciples make the people sit down by companies on the green grass. And they sat down in clumps of fifty or a hundred. Read vv. 39, 40. It was springtime; the grass was very green, and as the people there wore bright-coloured clothes, they must have looked like beds of flowers on the green hillside. Five thousand men, besides women and children, were spread out on the grass. The disciples wondered, perhaps, what Jesus meant; all would

wonder; but they cheerfully did what Jesus bade. The five loaves and two fishes next were brought to Him.

First He looked up to heaven and blessed them (that is, said 'grace' over them), then He broke them and gave to His disciples to distribute to the people, and lo! as they went from rank to rank and from company to company, still they had enough, still they had more to give. So all the five thousand men, the women too and children that were there, had an abundant meal from the five loaves and two fishes which were blessed by Jesus. Read vv. 41, 42. When they had finished Jesus said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost' (John vi. 12). See how wrong Jesus thought it to *waste* anything. Some people might have said, 'Since it costs Him so little trouble to provide abundance of bread there is no use caring for these broken pieces.' But no! He said, 'Gather up these'; and the Apostles gathered a basketful each, twelve in all, although they had not more than one basketful before the people began to eat.

LESSONS

1. This story may teach you children a thing which it will be very happy for you if you learn, viz. that **Jesus is full of compassion and kindness.** In the lesson of last Sunday we saw that He had great pity for people in sorrow, and we saw that He was kind too in little things, being the first to recollect that the little girl would be hungry (Lesson XXXI.) But the lesson of Jesus' compassion is one you should learn often. And in this story we have read to-day you see that He had great pity for the people's souls, and did not grudge teaching them though He had wished to be quiet. You also see that He took kind thought about their hungry bodies, and used His great power to feed the multitude of men, women, and children. It was a pleasure to Him to do it. And He does this same kindness often in wonderful ways now. There was a family in the south of Scotland, whose father was from home, and their mother one day found that all the food in the house was done and she had no money to buy more. She was very sorry for her little hungry children, but she persuaded them to go quietly to bed without any supper, and said she had told the Lord all about it, and she was sure He would send them something in the morning. Next morning the carrier brought a nice present of food from her father, who did not know how badly off she was, but thought she would be glad of some nice things for the children. They were astonished, but she thanked the Lord, and bade them always trust Him. Her son John (Mr. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides) says he never forgot that day.

2. This story teaches also that **you children may do much good though you have little money and little power.** Would you wish to do good to poor people or neglected and ill-treated people? Yes, you say; but you have little strength, little time, little money. Then you should bring what you have to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to bless it and make it go a great way.

FOR THE TEACHER

The children are supposed to have their Bibles open at Mark vi., and to read there. They may turn also to John vi. for some things.

XXXIII.—JESUS WALKS ON THE SEA OF GALILEE

Matt. xiv. 22-33; Mark vi. 45-52; John vi. 15-21

Introduction.—Of all the mighty works which Jesus had done up to this time, none had made the people so glad and proud as that last one of feeding the five thousand men. So many were together and saw it: it went on so wonderfully before their eyes on that green hillside: so many had themselves eaten of the bread: it was so like the days of old of which they had heard when their fathers were in the wilderness under command of Moses and got manna to eat. Their hearts were stirred: they said Jesus must be the prophet that Moses said would come like himself (Deut. xviii. 15, 18; John vi. 14). They wished to have Jesus for king. Perhaps they thought He could feed armies of men and conquer the Romans who oppressed them. Before they left the place where Jesus had fed them they were on the point of taking Him even by force to make Him king (John vi. 15).

I. **Jesus goes up into the Mountain to pray.**—Was Jesus pleased? This was great popularity. He had never been so popular before. He saw what was in their thoughts of course. But it did not please Him: it grieved Him. He was not come to be a king of that kind, to save them from the Romans. He came to be a king of another kind, to save them from their sins. Our sins are our greatest enemies. When Jesus saw what the people were thinking He wished to be alone. He sent His disciples away—rather against their will, for they would have liked what the people proposed (observe 'constrained,' Matt. xiv. 22). He sent the multitudes away to their homes: they could not help obeying Him, and went. Why did He wish to be alone? To pray to His Father. Jesus prayed long with His Father when there was much on His mind (Lesson XII.) And on His mind now was this great grief that the people of Galilee, for all He had done among them, did not know what was for their good, and still were not ready to receive it. He made the mountain His place of prayer, and the night the time of it. There in the dark, with the stars over His head, for many hours He was alone with His Father. That is how Jesus spent the night after the miracle of feeding the five thousand. Read Matt. xiv. 22, 23.

II. **His Disciples alone and in Distress.**—The disciples, you remember, had been 'constrained' to get into the boat, and go before Him to the other side [the west side, which they had left the day before when they came away for rest; Capernaum and Bethsaida, or '*Fish-town*,' were there]. They went, but with hearts disappointed that Jesus would not take that kinghood. Soon it was quite dark: a great wind blew—a contrary wind—and the waves rose high (John vi. 17, 18). They rowed against it with toil, and were distressed (Matt. xiv. 24). They would be downhearted, for Jesus was not with them. Tossed by the waves and nearly beaten by the contrary wind, they would feel it a sad change from the proud and happy time in the afternoon before, when they were giving bread from Jesus to thousands. If Jesus had been with them they might have remembered the storm that He had stilled by His word (Lesson XXVI.), and have had good courage. But it was a new thing for them to be in trouble and without Him.

III. **Jesus comes to them walking on the Water.**—Had Jesus forgotten His disciples? No: and though He was up in the mountain out of their sight in the dark He *saw* them (Mark vi. 48), and saw that they were distressed. He took this as an opportunity to teach them. Jesus was always training them for the work they were to do when He would be taken from them. Now He wished them to learn to depend upon Him, though unseen, and look for His help, and expect it to come in the worst distress they would meet with. So He let them go on most of the night by themselves. The more they were wearied and beaten, the more they would value His help when it came, and remember it. He let it be the fourth watch of the night before He did anything for them. [Explain the night from 6 P.M. to 6 A.M. was divided into four 'watches,' of three hours each. The fourth watch was then the last of the night, between 3 A.M. and 6 A.M.] Though they had been so long rowing they were little more than half-way across (25 or 30 furlongs out of 40, John vi. 19). Now He came to their help in a wonderful manner—walking on the sea. He walked on it as if it had been a floor of marble. We can hardly wonder that when the disciples saw Him in the dim light they were troubled in mind and thought they saw a 'ghost,' or 'apparition.' In fact they cried out for fear. But Jesus let them hear His voice, the voice they were familiar with as their Master's, the voice they loved to hear, the voice that all evil things and evil spirits fled from. Kind words they heard in that voice: **'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.'** What a change in their hearts that voice must have made! How glad they must have felt! The thing they were afraid of turned out to be their Friend and Master. Read Matt. xiv. 25-27.

IV. **Peter walks on the Water.**—They all felt glad; and Peter, who was the quickest to change in his feelings, felt of a sudden so brave, that if that were Jesus he would walk on the water too. A little ago he was afraid in the boat; now, with Jesus near, he felt he would not be afraid to step out of it, and put his feet on the waves. See what he said to Jesus (Matt. xiv. 28). Jesus said, 'Come,' and Peter did walk on the water to go to Jesus (v. 29). He went a little way safely, but when he saw what a strong wind it was, he began to be afraid, and at the same moment he began to sink. Was it Peter's own power that kept him from sinking? No, it was the power of Jesus: and as long as he looked to Jesus, and thought of His power, he could walk even on the waves. But when he began to look round at the wind and waves and think of himself, his courage left him, and he began to sink. But when he was sinking, in his despair he thought of Jesus again, and cried, 'Lord, save me.' And immediately he felt the hand of Jesus catch hold of him, and save him (vv. 30, 31). Did Peter deserve to be praised for what he did? Yes: it showed great faith in Jesus to believe he could walk on the stormy waters if Jesus called him. And he did it. But Peter was apt to be proud, and to think of himself, and needed to learn by sinking as he did that he had no power of his own that could support him on such waves, and that he could do it only by thinking of Jesus, and looking to Him and to His glorious power.

V. **They worship Jesus as the Son of God.**—Jesus and Peter were now taken into the boat. Gladly the disciples would have Jesus with them. The wind ceased, and immediately the boat was at the land (John vi. 21).

How wonderful things they had seen in that night! How they would remember in after-years the manner in which Jesus came through the dark and over the waves, and the happy change made in their own hearts by His coming, and by the wind falling quiet, and the shore being immediately reached. They felt they had seen the glory of Jesus more that night than ever before. So they worshipped Him and said, 'Of a truth though art the Son of God.' Never before had they joined in giving Jesus that high title. How glad they must have been to have such a Master!

LESSONS

1. We may learn from this story that **Jesus, who is now high up in heaven, sees and watches and thinks about His disciples down here on earth.**—When he was up in that mountain with His Father, and far out of sight of the twelve who were in the boat, He saw them and thought about them, and knew all their difficulty. So it is now. He is in the high and holy hill of God with His Father, out of sight; but He sees and cares for us. It helps us much to know of such a Friend watching us. Of course this is not a help if in our hearts we are not friends with Jesus. Lafayette, a French gentleman, was imprisoned two years in Austria: there was a little hole in the door of his cell for the sentinel outside to watch him through. He told after he got out that the most painful thing in his imprisonment was that unkindly eye which he could never get away from. But a friendly eye is a great help, especially in our troubles, and how happy it is for us if we know Jesus, and love Him, and know His glorious power, to remember that through the darkest night and in the midst of discouraging toils He is watching us with care and love!

2. What we read here about Peter shows us **how to do impossibilities.** Peter did what was impossible, because he had the courage to believe in the glorious power of Jesus and got His leave and call to try. So in our own day Christian men and women have done impossibilities—things so great and good that everybody when they began said they were impossible. How did they do them? As Peter did. They believed in the glorious power of Jesus, and that if He called them and gave them leave to try, they could do what human power could not. Sometimes like him they lost heart and began to sink in despair when they looked at the difficulties, but when they cried to Jesus they felt His hand and heard His voice, and that upheld them.

FOR THE TEACHER

Matt. xiv. 22-33 to be used for reading in class.

XXXIV.—SERMON ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

John vi. 22-59

I. **The Time, Place, Hearers, and Subject of the Sermon.**—To-day our lesson is about a sermon of Jesus. *When* was this sermon preached? At a memorable time—the day after He fed the 5000 men with five loaves and two fishes. *Where* was it preached? In the synagogue at Capernaum (vi. 59). Jesus (as we read last Lesson) came back to Capernaum in the night, walking on the water, and next day preached in the synagogue there. (Recall his sermon *on the Mount*: his preaching from *the boat*: *this* sermon was spoken in the 'church,' as we would say, at Capernaum.) Who were *the hearers*? People whom He had fed the day before (vv. 22-24 tell how they came across). This sermon was more like a conversation than a sermon nowadays; for it was the fashion with the Jews to interrupt the preacher by questions and remarks. Now what was the *subject* of this sermon? It was the **Bread of Life—Bread from Heaven.** You see that this was a solemn and beautiful subject. Our bodies need food; but our souls also need food. If our bodies do not get food, first they grow weak and faint and then they die. So too if our souls do not get food they will be weak and must die at last, and the death of the soul is far worse than the death of the body. The food of the soul is a far higher kind of thing than the food of the body. Could our souls be fed with any food made from corn that grows in the fields? Could that keep our souls from dying? No: they must have higher food. Jesus came to give that food. He called it Bread of Life, Bread from Heaven. He was very anxious to give it because He values people's souls so much. It was this He spoke of in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Was not this the very day to speak of it and these hearers the very people? For the day before He had given them wonderful bread for their bodies. After seeing Him feed so many with earthly food in such a manner, would they not be ready to believe Him when He spoke of heavenly food? Indeed if they had been devout and hungering after righteousness they might have been hoping he would now feed their souls.

II. **First Part of the Sermon: The two kinds of Bread.**—But when Jesus met the people in the synagogue their state of mind grieved Him. He knew people's thoughts and He saw they were not thinking of their souls at all, but wishing Him to go on giving them more bread for their bodies. He reproved them for this (v. 26) and began His sermon by telling them that there are two kinds of food—one kind that does not last ('perisheth'), another that lasts to eternal life. He bade them not work only for the first, but for the second; and told them He would give it them (v. 27). Some of them asked *how* they were to work for that better food (v. 28)? He answered that *believing in Him* was the way to work for it (v. 29). But they objected and asked a *sign first*; asked what wonderful work Jesus did that would be a sign that they ought to believe in Him. We might think those people had had enough of a sign when they saw Jesus only a day before feed the 5000 men. At the time it was done they did think He was the Messiah, the King and Prophet they expected. But since then they

had been comparing Him with Moses and remembering that the manna in Moses' time (Exod. xvi. 14, 36), which was a sort of bread from heaven, for it came down from the skies as dew does, came every day for forty years. Now unless Jesus would often repeat His wonderful work, it seemed He was not the prophet *greater* than Moses, whom they expected. They wished Him to do something more as a sign (vv. 30, 31). Jesus answered them that it was not Moses who gave the manna, and that God, His Father, who gave that manna, was giving now bread that came from higher than the skies, *true* bread, of which the manna was only a sign—bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (vv. 32, 33). The people were struck by His solemn words and said, 'Lord, evermore give us this bread' (v. 33). But they were still thinking only of bread for the body. (Compare the woman of Samaria, who when Jesus told of the 'living water' said, Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.) They thought He was offering some very wonderful bodily food.

III. **Second Part: Jesus is Himself the Bread of Life.**—Then Jesus made the surprising answer, 'I am the Bread of Life.' It was Himself He had been speaking of as food from heaven, the bread of God that cometh down out of heaven. This saying of Jesus, '*I* am the Bread of Life,' may seem difficult to us; but we need not be surprised that the food of the soul should be very different from the food of the body; and we can often see that Jesus does to the soul what food does to the body; He *strengthens* the soul of those who believe in Him, as food strengthens a hungry man; He *satisfies* their soul as food satisfies. If they have been weary in doing good, and faint, when they come to Him they are revived and strengthened and cheered. They feel as if their soul had eaten bread—the right kind of bread for it. And they find when they come to Jesus that they always get enough to satisfy their weary souls; they are never left hungry and thirsty: that is what He says in v. 35.

What did the people in the synagogue think? Did they believe Jesus when He uttered this surprising and solemn and kind word, 'I am the Bread of Life'? Did they say, Lord give us this bread; teach us how to feed upon Thee and so have life in our souls? No, they murmured; they muttered in their places in the synagogues and said to one another, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know about? He is not from *heaven* but from *Nazareth* (vv. 41, 42). Jesus knew what they said, bade them not murmur as they were doing (v. 43), and repeated what He had said, told it them again more fully and solemnly, beginning with 'Verily, verily, I say unto you' (vv. 47, 48). Great and wonderful as they thought the manna, He tells them that what He is offering is far higher, 'Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and they died.' The manna did not prevent their dying in the end. The bread He is speaking of—whoever eats it shall live for ever (vv. 49-51).

IV. **Third Part: Jesus will give Life by His Death.**—But now Jesus said a thing that astonished His hearers in the synagogue still more. 'The bread which I will give is My flesh—for the life of the world' (v. 51). Now they more than muttered: they 'strove' and wrangled. They were often very disorderly in their synagogues, and now some took the side of Jesus, some spoke against Him, and they argued, most of them opposing, and saying, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' (v. 52). Jesus did

not draw back what He had said, though they objected. He went on and said it again in a more startling way, with 'verily, verily' before it—see what He says about *eating His flesh and drinking His blood* (vv. 53-56). It had been startling to hear Jesus speaking of giving His flesh to eat: but now when He spoke of *drinking His blood*, many would say it was shocking. The Jews were forbidden to use the blood even of an animal as food. To do this was against their religion,—against the law of Moses. So you see this that Jesus said was very hard for them to receive.

Can you children guess what Jesus was thinking of when He said He would give His flesh for the life of the world, and spoke afterwards of His flesh and blood as giving life? Do you not see that He was speaking of His death? His blood was to be shed, and His flesh hung on the cross. But this death of Jesus would be life to all who believe in Him—life eternal. It is through dying for men that Jesus is able to give them eternal life. Only those who receive Him that died for them will be forgiven and live with God in heaven. To receive Him who died for us, is to 'eat His flesh and drink His blood.'

God gives corn for our bodily food. But before we can feed upon it, it has to be bruised and crushed. It does not become bread fit to be eaten without that. So the Lord Jesus had to be broken and bruised on the cross before He could give eternal life to our souls, and be our Bread of Life.

LESSONS

1. **Let us thank God and praise Him for giving us bread from heaven.**—God gives us daily bread for our bodies, and we thank Him. Let us thank Him for food to our souls,—living bread—of which if we eat we shall have eternal life. Jesus has told us here of this bread, and His words are truth.

2. **Let us remember how we may get it.**—If men had to go across the seas for it, as they go for gold, or to work long for it, it would be well worth while. But **we get it by coming to Jesus and believing in Him** (vv. 29, 35, 40). He never disappoints any who come to Him (vv. 35, 37). He gives Himself to us: and he is the Bread of Life.

FOR THE TEACHER

No lesson can be well taught without careful study of the subject. This very difficult lesson requires especial study. The subject is very mysterious: but still, the gracious tone of the words, and the high blessing spoken of may deeply affect the children's thoughts. In the above sketch the true translation is followed of v. 27, '*Work* not,' etc., and of v. 33, 'The bread of God is *that* which,' etc. Not till v. 35 does Jesus say, 'I am the bread,' etc. Also vv. 37-40 are left out, as a digression in which Jesus dwells on the blessedness of those who come to Him as believers; vv. 42-46 are again a digression on the need of grace from God in order to come as a believer.

XXXV.—HEALING OF THE DAUGHTER OF THE SYROPHŒNICIAN WOMAN

Matt. xv. 21-28; Mark vii. 24-30

Read Matt. xv. 21-28

Introduction.—This lesson marks the approach of a new period in the life of our Lord. He had been accused of transgressing the traditions of the elders by the Scribes and Pharisees; because His disciples had omitted the sacred custom of washing of hands before meals. He was therefore indirectly declared to be defiled. In answer to their accusation, He tried to convince them that their own defilement was deeper far than any that could be contracted by the mere breaking of a tradition. His plain words had so roused them that they were now prepared publicly to accuse Him of contempt for their sacred law, and if possible to compass His destruction. He therefore retired into Phœnicia, not only to allow the popular feeling which had been stirred up against Him to subside, but also, as the time of His decease was fast hastening on, to instruct His disciples in the truth of which they were so soon to be the custodiers and teachers.

I. **Christ's Withdrawal to Phœnicia** (v. 21).—Although Christ had for a time attracted multitudes by His miracles and His preaching, now the tide had turned. Scribes from Jerusalem have accused Him and threatened Him. Many of those who followed Him do so no longer. So Jesus departs into the coasts—not the sea-shore, but borders—of Tyre and Sidon. Thus He was like Elijah outside the limits of the promised land (1 Kings xvii. 9).

In that heathen borderland He wished to live in retirement for a time. To be away from the plots of the Pharisees and from the strife of tongues; to have communion with His Father in heaven in quietness and peace. But near as it was to the scenes of His former wondrous deeds, it is not surprising that He should have been recognised. This Syrophœnician woman, having found Him out, came to Him with an appeal which would accept of no denial. The disciples followed Jesus into retirement because they believed Him to be the promised Messiah (John vi. 66-69), as well as because they loved Him dearly. Jesus must have been helped by their love for Him, and their faithfulness would cheer Him when across the Gentile border.

II. **The Syrophœnician Woman's Prayer** (v. 22).—It was a heathen country to which Christ had retired, but His fame as a healer had gone before Him even into it. And so when it was known that He was in the country, this heathen woman looked to Him with great hope. Her home had been darkened by a terrible distress. What was that (v. 22)? Here was at least a chance of healing. Notice her **unselfish love.** She asked nothing for herself, but for her daughter; she identifies herself with her daughter's suffering, 'Have mercy upon **me.**' Why? Because her love for her daughter was very great. Think of the unselfishness, the strength, and unweariedness of a mother's love, and remember what it has done and is every day doing for you. How much more unwearied is our Heavenly Father's love!

Notice too **her faith.** She addressed Christ as the 'Son of David.' Why? Because the neighbouring heathen nations knew well the Messianic hopes of the Jews. From His character and work she believed Him to be the Messiah. It required great faith to do this. She knew that the Jews looked with contempt upon all other nations.

Notice her **earnestness.** How does she show this? She **cried** after Christ, and would not be silenced. You know the difference between the way of asking for what **is** much wanted, and the way of asking for what **is not** much wanted. Like the leper (Mark i. 40) she had no doubt of Christ's **ability;** and so she threw herself upon His grace.

III. **Christ's Test of the Woman's Faith** (v. 23).—Christ does not answer her petition. Not because He has no interest in her, but because He wishes to test the strength of her faith. While He is silent the disciples interfere. They would have her sent away. Then Jesus spoke out. He seems to answer the disciples' request, while in reality He reminds her that she had no claim on His help. He seemed (*a*) to take no notice of her, and (*b*) when He did speak it was **at** her, not **to** her—a peculiarly disagreeable way of being spoken to. And then what a seemingly hopeless answer! Why? Because she knew that she was not of the house of Israel—that she was a member of a despised race. Did this answer cause her to lose all hope? No! It only quickened her faith, and made her believe that He **wished** to help her. How does she show this? v. 25.

The black looks of the disciples do not frighten her; the apparent apathy of Christ does not damp her courage; the reminder that she is not of Israel does not destroy hope. She still followed, still besought. Note the simple words of her prayer, 'Lord, help **me.**' She still asks for herself. **Every child can offer a prayer like that.** To most the answer she got (v. 26) would have seemed hopeless; but to her quick faith it gave hope. He came to feed the children of promise, not the dogs of Gentiles—the little dogs, as He calls them, to soften the harshness of the term. [Explain that dogs are not treated in the East as with us. We regard them as useful pets and make them companions,—there they are treated as vermin.]

IV. **The Woman's Humility** (v. 27).—How humble she was!—always a trait of true goodness. Note how quick she was to find out Christ's desire to help her. Dogs may get little food from their masters, still they get something. She does not resent being called a dog, because she was quick to see that the hated name gave her **some** claim upon Christ's compassion. **A crumb** of mercy would be sufficient. Crumbs were the portion of dogs, and that she could now **claim** as her own.

V. **The Woman's Reward** (v. 28).—What a marvellous reward was hers! Her mother's love had enabled her to overcome every difficulty, and now her daughter is given back to her restored to her right mind and will. Her belief in Christ was perfect, and she would not stop asking till she got. She was a true daughter of Abraham, because she knelt in true worship at the feet of Israel's Messiah. Once before we find Jesus praising the faith manifested by a heathen (Matt. viii. 10), and, as here, the reward is great.

LESSONS

1. **The unselfishness of a mother's love.**—Most of us know what it is by experience. Are we grateful for it? Do we show that gratitude by being loving, obedient, helpful?

2. **The power of believing and persevering prayer.**—This woman believed in Christ, and because she believed she persevered in her petition. No difficulty kept her back. She knew what she wanted; she believed Christ could give it; she continued asking. Daily prayer a very great privilege. Prayer without faith is useless. We must **know** what we want. We must **ask** it again and again, until we obtain it. **'Ask, and it shall be given you.'**

XXXVI.—PETER'S GREAT CONFESSION

Matt. xvi. 13-20

Introduction.—This lesson marks the beginning of the second great division of our Lord's ministry. This great confession of St. Peter's is the first public acknowledgment of Christ's Messiahship. As His public ministry began by God's proclaiming Him as His own Son (Matt. iii. 17), so is St. Peter's public declaration of His Messiahship confirmed by the wonderful transfiguration scene (Matt. xvii. 1-8). The time had come when it was necessary to prepare His disciples for His coming sufferings and death. Intimations like that given in v. 21 were not infrequent to the end. But before any such intimation was made, Christ strengthened the faith and comforted the hearts of His disciples by the founding of His Church—the Church which was to be the means of bringing all men to know and love and serve Him. From the time when He made answer to St. Peter in the words of v. 18 He has manifested and blessed His Church, as is evident from the wondrous progress it has made.

Sketch of Lesson.—The last lesson told us of the power and success of true prayer. It taught us that prayer is a valuable, comforting, and helpful exercise—that it is not a *difficult duty*, but a *precious privilege*. **Long prayers are not necessary; the heathen woman's prayer was a very short one—so short that the youngest child could easily remember and repeat it.** If we ask from God what we really feel we need, we may be sure that in some way or other He will answer us. Recall also the wonderful effect this woman's faith in Christ must have had upon the disciples, banished as they were from their native land, and how its exhibition must have strengthened their belief in Him as the Messiah. They needed such help. At first great crowds followed Christ, attracted by His deeds of healing, His many wonderful miracles. But His teaching offended the chief men—He and His disciples had to flee for their lives. This was a new and painful experience to them, and yet they did not desert Christ. This lesson tells us why.

I. **Christ's first Question and the Disciples' Answer** (vv. 13, 14).—This question was put to the disciples when they had fled for a season—when Christ's mission seemed a failure. [Explain the power of the approval of others. Show how the approval of parents and teachers makes obedience easy, even when obedience means doing something disagreeable.] Christ had lived a good life—had helped many, healed many, worked miracles for their good. What did the people think of Him and His work? Although the chief men hated Him on account of His pure teaching and His blameless life, the people had some *dim idea* of His greatness. On one occasion they wonderingly asked, 'Is not this the Son of David?' (Matt. xii. 23), evidently believing that He *might* be the Messiah. His life and miracles declared Him to be some extraordinary person. So high an opinion had they of Him, that they believed Him to be a special messenger sent by God. He might be John the Baptist risen from the dead (Matt. xiv. 2); He might be Elijah come to announce the speedy appearance of the Messiah

(Mal. iv. 5); He might be Jeremiah, concerning whose reappearance there was a popular belief; or one of the prophets risen again.

II. Christ's second Question and Peter's Confession of Christ as the Messiah (vv. 15, 16).—[Remind the children of the great outward difficulties that beset the disciples when this direct question was put to them, as noted above. In such circumstances they might have hesitated to answer such a direct question. If they had any doubt as to the truth of Christ's claim to the Messiahship, their very love for Him would have caused them to hesitate.] **True Love never inflicts unnecessary pain.** No sign of any hesitation. At once comes the reply (v. 16); St. Peter speaks for all the others. 'Thou art the Christ—the Son of the living God.' **Note here the strength of St. Peter's faith.** Great difficulties were in the way. At that time Christ seemed to be as far as possible from success—from the realisation of His Messianic claims; and yet St. Peter and the other disciples had no doubt. Every difficulty would disappear—the Christ would in due time come to His rightful heritage. Living with the Saviour; hearing Him speak as man never spoke; seeing His blameless life; witnessing His never-wearying, unselfish work for others; joining in the prayers which He addressed to 'His Father,' the disciples felt that He was very near to God—that He was in truth the Messiah.

III. **St. Peter's Faith rested on a sure Foundation** (v. 17).—How joyfully does Christ acknowledge the truth of St. Peter's confession of faith in Himself! How greatly blessed he was in being able to make it! This faith in Christ was now a living union between them, and would elevate and sweeten his whole nature. [Illustrate by the force of good example and the influence of good companions.] How did St. Peter arrive at this belief in Christ's Messiahship? **'Flesh and blood'** had not taught him the truth. It was not by his own natural powers nor by any merely human teaching that he came to this faith in Jesus as the Messiah. He might have suspected the truth from the wonderful character of Jesus, but he did not *know* until God had revealed it to him. He had felt his own sinfulness (Luke v. 8) and his need of a Saviour. God had given him to see that Christ could give him forgiveness and eternal life (John vi. 68). Hence his faith in Christ. **Only when sinfulness is felt is there also felt the need of a Saviour.**

IV. **St Peter's Faith qualifies him for special Service** (v. 18).—When St. Peter was first brought to Jesus, He foretold what his future character would be (John i. 42). 'Thou shalt be called Cephas' = a stone. Impulsive and unreliable as he was then, he was to grow into a **firm, strong, reliable** character. Up till now he had been called Simon; his name henceforth was to be Peter = a rock. His felt need of Christ, and his faith in Him had fitted him for becoming a *firm* and *strong* foundation-stone in the Church of Christ. [*A building to be secure must have a solid foundation.* You have all seen workmen laying the foundation of a house. How broad and big the stones are! and as the work proceeds, how carefully every stone is prepared for its own place, in order that the building may be shapely and strong.] Christ here tells St. Peter that He means to build a church—a church of human souls—of men and women

and children—'living stones' built up into a spiritual house (1 Pet. ii. 4-6). It was in this spiritual house that St. Peter was to be a strong foundation-stone, and in which all of us ought to be 'living stones.'

V. **St. Peter's Faith qualified him for special Reward** (v. 19).—It was a very wonderful reward he received. Note how Christ here changes the idea of His Church. In the last verse it is a building to be formed of living stones—the redeemed souls of His people; here it is a kingly palace into which *all* are invited. The great reward of St. Peter's faith was, that to him were to be given the keys of this royal palace. [Illustrate by a teacher rewarding good behaviour with a post of trust.] St. Peter was to be privileged in helping to admit others to the same blessedness which he enjoyed. He was not to act as did the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii. 13). He was not to stand at **locked** doors; he got the keys, that *every one* might be invited to come in. How did he exercise his office? **By preaching the truth that had been revealed to him by God.** In the first part of the Acts we have a full record of how well he fulfilled this trust. As St. Peter was privileged thus to serve, so also were the other Apostles (Matt. xviii. 18).

VI. **Christ forbids the disciples to speak of Him as the Messiah** (v. 20).—He knew that no good could come of a premature declaration of His Messiahship. He desired that others should **find out** His true character and mission as St. Peter had done—by a felt need of Him as their Saviour; and for that He must wait and work and pray.

LESSONS

1. **We will never find out the Saviour's real character until we feel that we have need of His salvation.**—It was St. Peter's consciousness of his own weakness, as well as his consciousness of Christ's ability to give him all that he needed, upon which his faith was founded.

2. **We can become living stones in Christ's Church only by the same process which St. Peter underwent.**—We are rough, uncut, unpolished, until we come under the influence of the Spirit of God. We must believe in the Christ, the Son of the living God.

3. **We can have the same faith as St. Peter had by asking it from God,** and that faith will help us to live happy, useful, Christian lives.

XXXVII.—THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

Matt. xvii. 1-9; Mark ix. 2-10; Luke ix. 28-36

Introduction.—As hinted in the last lesson, the transfiguration of Christ was the authoritative declaration of His Messiahship. It was God's seal set upon His declaration of the sufferings which awaited Him. Notwithstanding Christ's declaration, the disciples were unwilling to believe in His coming sufferings, just because they did not understand the nature of His mission. With His present surroundings it was difficult for them to believe that the kingdom He claimed as His own was one of surpassing power and glory; after the transfiguration they could have no doubt. **The truth to be carefully taught in this lesson is the necessity that Christ's sufferings should go before His glory.** The lesson also shows that if the cross be bravely borne, the crown will be certain.

Sketch of Lesson.—[Recall paragraphs III., IV., and V. in last lesson, and try to make the children understand the *nature* and *strength* of St. Peter's faith.] The happiness which the disciples felt after St. Peter's declaration of his belief in Christ as the Son of God, did not last long. Soon after, Christ pointedly told them of His coming sufferings and shameful death. The thought that their dear Master was not only to suffer but to suffer *shamefully*, must have grieved them greatly. **Great part of our suffering lies in seeing and yet being unable to relieve the suffering of those we love.** Our lesson to-day tells us how Christ confirmed St. Peter's faith, and convinced him that his belief was well founded.

I. **The favoured Three.**—After a whole week of grieving over the coming shame of their Master, the faith of Peter, James, and John was strengthened in a marvellous way. [Explain that the 'after six days' of St. Matthew is the same as 'about eight days after' of St. Luke, as St. Luke counts the days on which the confession and transfiguration took place as whole days, as the Jews were in the habit of reckoning. St. Matthew and St. Mark count the days between.] On other occasions these three disciples were chosen for special honour. (*a*) At the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark v. 37). (*b*) At the agony in the garden (Matt. xxvi. 37). These three He led up into an high mountain. This mountain was long supposed to be Tabor, but it is now believed to have been Hermon. Probably this wonderful scene took place during the night. Think of the darkness and loneliness, but remember that God is everywhere, that no distance or darkness can hide from Him. Christ knew that, for St. Luke tells us that He went there to pray. If we could always remember that God is everywhere, we would be much more careful of our conduct. Though our parents cannot always see us, God does.

II. **The wonderful Sight the Disciples saw.**—As He prayed He was transfigured = changed in form. The word implies more than a change of mere outward form. Note the different expressions used to explain this change. St. Matthew: '**His face did shine as the sun.**' St. Mark: '**His**

raiment . . . so as no fuller on earth can white them.' [Fuller = a cleanser of linen garments.] He covered Himself with light as with a garment (compare also Rev. i. 14-16; Acts xxvi. 13). Think of that wondrous glory so imperfectly described! And this was Jesus, their Master, who was being persecuted and driven from His home! St. Peter had declared that He was the Messiah, and here is a wonderful confirmation from God Himself. Think of the wondrous happiness they must have felt when they knew *for certain* that He was the Son of God,—that His glory was no mere earthly glory,—that He was indeed a king,—exercising heavenly rule.

III. **Christ's Companions.**—The astonished eyes of the three disciples saw beside the glorified form of their Master two other glorious forms—Moses and Elijah—the two greatest men in the Old Testament; the first the great lawgiver,—the other the great prophet. Their experience at certain periods of their lives was similar. (*a*) Both had a long period of fasting (Deut. ix. 9; 1 Kings xix. 8). (*b*) To each was given to see a vision of God's power and glory (Exod. xxxiii. 18-23; 1 Kings xix. 11-13). (*c*) God Himself buried the one (Deut. xxxiv. 6), the other was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings ii. 11). (*d*) And now had they come back to earth to manifest Christ's glory. The scribes accused Jesus of destroying the law; here was the completest answer. How marvellous all this must have appeared to the disciples! Never more would they doubt Christ's divine mission, or the final accomplishment of His great work. But listen! The visitors are talking to Jesus! What are they saying? They are speaking of Christ's decease (= departure)—that shameful death over which the disciples had been grieving so bitterly during the past week. **Here was another surprise.** These two glorified saints talking with Christ about that awful death. It was evidently known to God the Father, approved of in heaven; and,—bitter as it was,—they must believe its truth, and accept all its pain and shame as a stern necessity.

IV. **St. Peter's Proposal.**—St. Luke's fuller account tells us that the disciples had been so overpowered with the glory of the vision, that they had fallen into a deep sleep; but suddenly starting into full wakefulness, they saw that the heavenly visitors were departing. If only the bitterness of that shameful death could be avoided! Why could it *not* be avoided? Why should its dark shadow destroy their happiness? Impulsively and unthinkingly does St. Peter speak (v. 4). [Tabernacles = little huts made of the branches of trees and used during the Feast of Tabernacles.] But that could not be; the glory had not yet been **won**; this glimpse of it was given to them only that they might *know* of its reality;—many a hard battle had yet to be fought before they were fitted to be permanent companions of those heavenly visitants;—many a bitter cross had to be borne;—St. Peter had yet to deny his Lord in the struggle for goodness before that blessedness was theirs. [*Illustrate by explaining that rest is enjoyed and valued only after hard labour; that play is pleasant just because it comes after lessons are learned and errands gone; that times of relaxation are valuable only because they give strength for further effort.*] St. Peter spoke in ignorance, dazed, dazzled with such a vision of heavenly glory. He did not know that

the sight to be seen on Calvary would be more glorious than the vision seen on Hermon.

V. **God the Father's Declaration.**—But now a bright cloud overshadows them—the Shechinah, or cloud of glory, which was the symbol of the Divine presence (Exod. xxxiii. 9); into it disappear Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, out of it came the voice which was heard before at His baptism (Matt. iii. 17), and again in the temple court just before the end (John xii. 28). **God the Father proclaiming to men the Divine Sonship of Christ.** Men, —poor,—sinful men, had dared to hate and persecute **Him** with whom God is *well pleased* (Isa. xlii. 1). Note the command, '**Hear ye Him.**' Moses and Elijah had been *great* and *good*, so were many other prophets and teachers; but their merit consisted in the faithfulness with which they prepared the way for the coming Messiah. Now that the Messiah is come, **He alone is to be heard and obeyed.** The disciples fell on their faces, just as the terror-stricken Israelites did at Sinai (Exod. xx. 19), and then they felt the touch and heard the voice of the Master they loved. Their terror departed; they looked up, and saw **Jesus only.** The light had vanished; the glory had departed; Moses and Elijah had gone back to heaven; only Christ remained, '**Hear ye Him.**'

VI. **Jesus enjoins silence regarding the Vision.**—Nor, as yet, did they understand its meaning. Wondrous as the vision was, it was but a dim foreshadowing of the glory which burst upon the world at the resurrection of Jesus; its full meaning was learned only after He had gone back to His eternal home. The truth of the Resurrection was new to the disciples (Mark ix. 10). Jesus points out that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi (Mal. iv. 5). Not knowing him, or caring to know him, they had persecuted him as they would persecute the Son of man.

LESSONS

1. **Christ had to suffer that we might be saved.** 'Neither is there salvation in any other' (Acts iv. 12).

2. **Sharing Christ's sufferings here will assure a share of His glory hereafter.** 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him' (2 Tim. ii. 12).

XXXVIII.—CURE OF THE LUNATIC BOY

Matt. xvii. 14-21; Mark ix. 14-29; Luke ix. 37-42

Introduction.—There is a very clear connection between this lesson and the last. No doubt it would have been much *pleasanter* for Christ and the three disciples to have remained longer on the Mount of Transfiguration. Our lesson to-day gives a very strong reason why that could not be. The Transfiguration glory, Christ's converse with His heavenly visitants, had revealed to the disciples who and what their Master was, had refreshed and strengthened the wearied spirit of Christ, and now they must go back to the great work which was *urgently* demanding their attention. Their place was in the forefront of the battle with evil, and that they must hasten to occupy. 'Hardly such another contrast can be found in the gospels as this, between the open heaven and sons of glory on the Mount, and the valley beneath with its terrible forms of misery, pain, and unbelief' (Stier). Raphael, one of the greatest painters, in his wonderful picture of the Transfiguration, brings out this contrast very powerfully. On the holy Mount, peace, purity, heavenly radiance; at the foot, darkness, disorder, human passion, and wretchedness.

Sketch of Lesson.—This lesson ought to be more interesting than usual, because it tells us of the cure of a boy who had been very ill, suffered a great deal, and been a great care to his parents. Perhaps some of you have been ill, or if not, you may have seen your companions suffer; and therefore you can understand how glad this poor boy was to be freed from such a dreadful disease. When Christ and the three disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration, the other nine, who had been left behind, were in great trouble; for the poor father whose little boy was so ill, expected that they would be able to make him better, *but they could not*, and therefore they were very anxious that Christ should return.

I. **Christ appears at the right time** (Mark ix. 14, 15).—On coming down from the Mount He heard a great uproar. What was it all about? Had the people any right to expect that the disciples could cure this poor boy? Yes! Christ had given them power over unclean spirits, and they had exercised it (Mark vi. 7, 13), so that the people had some reason for being angry at their failure. They were jeering and scoffing at these poor disciples, and no doubt threatening them and their absent Master. Then Christ appeared, *ready, as at all times*, to help His disciples. The crowd opens to let Him pass, being greatly amazed at His appearance. Perhaps they were astonished at Him appearing just when He was so much needed. Perhaps the traces of the Transfiguration glory were still visible on His countenance, as the skin of Moses' face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai (Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30). He saw at once the danger and difficulty the disciples were in, and immediately asks the cause.

II. **The Helplessness of the Disciples.**—A man, hearing of their former miracle-working, had brought to them his son to be cured. He was very ill (Mark ix. 18). He could not speak (v. 17), yet he cried in a pitiable way (Luke ix. 39); he foamed at the mouth, gnashed his teeth, was utterly

helpless (Matt. xvii. 15), evidently the victim of epileptic fits. What made this application worse, **he was an only child** (Luke ix. 38), loved dearly by his parents—all the more dearly because he was so helpless and suffered so much. How much these poor parents were to be pitied! and the disciples could not help. They had tried, but their former power had gone from them. Nor was it altogether their fault; there was something wanting on the part of this poor father. Before such a miracle could be wrought **there must be faith in Christ's power** (Lesson XXXV.; note also Matt. ix. 29; Mark x. 52). When the father came to the disciples he had not this faith. He went to them probably in the spirit in which one tries a new remedy for an apparently hopeless disease, and therefore the disciples were powerless. Picture the scene—the jeering, threatening, angry crowd; in its midst the despairing father with his miserable child; the disciples wretched and disgraced with their failure. *Was it not high time for Christ to appear?*

III. **The Cause of the Disciples' Helplessness.**—That is not to be altogether accounted for by want of faith on the part of the father of the lunatic boy. They were puzzled at it; they wanted to heal the child; they could not understand their failure. They were so much in earnest that they afterwards questioned Christ on the subject. His answer we have in Matt. xvii. 20; Mark ix. 29. Let us try to understand how their faith was so weak. (*a*) They had been brooding for a whole week upon the coming sufferings of Christ. (*b*) Perhaps the element of shame in these sufferings made them doubt. (*c*) And then Christ and the three most prominent disciples had gone away and left them. (*d*) Perhaps the father's despair influenced them. (*e*) Perhaps the jeering, mocking multitude did the same. Their failure was not to be wondered at, although much to be regretted. *They had not tried the proper means to get back the power they had lost.* When their Master was wearied and cast down, He retired into a solitary place to pray. When difficulties came in His way, He did not shirk them, *at whatever cost to Himself.* He never suffered any opposition, *however vehemently expressed*, to turn Him from His Father's work. These men are as yet only disciples, and therefore not too much is to be expected from them. [*Warn the children of their own ignorance and helplessness, of the sins of vanity and conceit in every form. For a long time they must be disciples, and learn all that they can* in a gentle, teachable spirit. Their spirit ought to be that expressed in the hymn—

'We are but little children weak,
Nor born in any high estate;
What can we do for Jesus' sake,
Who is so high and good and great?']

IV. **Jesus rebukes the Faithlessness of all.**—Recall the contrast between the peace and glory of the Mount and this scene of riot and confusion, and notice the sorrow Jesus must have felt at the universal want of faith. The words of sorrowful rebuke are addressed to all (v. 17). (*a*) To the angry crowd; (*b*) the despairing father; (*c*) the helpless disciples. **Faithless** and **perverse**, *i.e.* wilful—hard words, but deserved, bent as they were on going their own way. '*How long shall I be with you?*'—an exclamation, not of impatience to get away from them, but of grief at their inability to understand Him, and their unwillingness to accept Him. So long as they were in that unbelieving, fault-finding, rebellious spirit, there

was nothing for them but disgrace and unhappiness. How the nine disciples must have felt the stern rebuke! [Enforce upon the children the evident application of this.] *'Bring him to me'—to Christ, where we must ever go in all difficulty.*

V. **The far-reaching Nature of Christ's Cure.**—*He is the friend, not of one, but of all.* He wished to read to every one present a much-needed lesson. (*a*) Not only to relieve the distress of the father by healing his child, (*b*) not only to strengthen the disciples' faith, (*c*) but also to inspire with a better spirit every member of that crowd, (*d*) as well as to explain to generations yet unborn the meaning of true faith. He questions the father as to the nature of the child's disease (Mark ix. 21), proves to him the reality of His interest, and then leads him to understand what was awanting in himself (Lesson XXXV.) He inspires the father with hope, plants the seed of faith in his heart (v. 24), and only after the father's faith is manifest, does He heal the child. *Jesus thus worked more than one miracle.* Not only did He cast the evil spirit out of the body of the child; He also dethroned the power of evil in the father's breast, while (v. 20) He removed the mountains of difficulties which had hindered the disciples' faith. [We often make our own difficulties, and when we do not make them altogether, we make them **harder** by the selfish, discontented spirit in which we approach them. It would be worth while our trying to overcome them in a right spirit just to experience the happiness of causing them to disappear.

'Then we may stay the angry blow,
Then we may check the hasty word,
Give gentle answers back again,
And fight a battle for our Lord.']

LESSONS

1. **We are all possessed more or less with evil spirits.**—Bad temper, disobedience, want of tenderness, sometimes cruelty, neglect of duty, selfishness in every form.

2. **If we would be happy we must try to get rid of these evil spirits.**—The youngest child has felt the misery of giving way to some of these. But even the youngest child can strive against them.

3. **We must all be cured by Christ, just as was this poor lunatic boy.**—His father took him to Christ. Parents, teachers, friends are all anxious to help you to the same cure and the same happiness. *Do listen to their teaching.*

TO THE TEACHER

The passage should be carefully read in St. Mark's gospel. He states the circumstances more fully, and so graphically that it is easy to remember them.

XXXIX.—PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Matt. xviii. 23-35

Introduction.—This lesson gives a very beautiful illustration of the law of Christian forgiveness. It was given as an answer to a question of St. Peter's, seeking for information on the subject. It is clear that our Lord's teaching had begun to stir very deeply the heart of St. Peter, and that he had already got glimpses of its true meaning. *The very form of his question proves this.* The Jewish custom (Amos i. 3; ii. 6) required forgiveness for *three* offences, and no doubt St. Peter imagined that he had fully entered into Christ's spirit when he increased the number to *seven.* Probably our Lord's answer had a reference to Gen. iv. 24, and if so, it contrasts very markedly with Lamech's seventy and seven-fold of revenge. More likely it is a mere play upon the number used by St. Peter to indicate the *unlimited* nature of Christ's forgiveness. By this lesson St. Peter was taught, as we all are taught, that having prayed for and obtained forgiveness from God, we cannot refuse forgiveness to others, however much they may have wronged us.

Sketch of Lesson (read from v. 21 very carefully).—This ought to be a very interesting lesson. It tells us about feelings which pass through our minds every day. You often feel angry with brothers, sisters, companions, when they have offended you in some way. At such times how do you treat them? Do you forgive them? Or do you wish to be revenged on them? Would you strike them and cause them to suffer, if you could do it safely? We all like to please ourselves so much that we often forget our Saviour's **golden rule** (Matt. vii. 12). This beautiful story tells us how we are to act when others offend us. We are constantly offending God, and because He freely forgives us when we really ask forgiveness, we must forgive others—not once or twice or seven times, but many times. Because God has loved us, so must we love one another.

I. **The Time of Reckoning.**—Christ has drawn this beautiful illustration from the custom of an Eastern court. The king had appointed governors of the distant provinces of the kingdom, and sent them away to rule them under his authority. They had promised to be *faithful to him and just to the people*, neither oppressing nor robbing them. The time came when they had to appear before him, to give an account of the way they had done their duty. *Explain that as these governors were responsible to their king, so are we all to God.* He has placed us in this world, given to each his work to do; the work even of the youngest is very important in the sight of God. If rightly done, it will bring true pleasure, true happiness. **Nor are any too young to be reckoned with.** God takes account of us when we do wrong through our consciences, which often make boys and girls miserable. And then sickness is a time of reckoning. The death of a dear friend also. Think of the goodness of God in having these times of reckoning. *If God did not speak to us by some kind of suffering, we might forget our obligations altogether, and go on increasing our responsibilities* (Rom. ii. 5).

II. **The Largeness of the Debt** (v. 24).—An enormous debt! so large

that only the governor of a rich province, using its revenue for his own purposes, could have incurred it. It may be worth while to compare 1 Chron. xxix. 4-7; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 3; and 2 Kings xviii. 14, as these passages give a comparative idea of the largeness of the sum mentioned. **This large sum is meant to testify the amount of our debt to God.** We have all sinned against God, and by *every sin* we incur God's anger. Does not this comparison show how helpless we are in God's sight? The first thing we have to learn is the fact that we are in debt to God, for before we realise the weight of the burden we will not seek to be freed from it. [*Christian in the* Pilgrim's Progress *started from the city of destruction only after the weight of this burden had become very oppressive.*]

III. **The threatened Punishment** (v. 25).—The fierce, harsh spirit here displayed by this king speaks of Oriental tyranny. The Jewish law was strict enough, but it did not countenance such harshness. It was permitted to make bondmen of debtors (Exod. xxii. 3), but the law of Jubilee took away great part of the cruelty even of this (Lev. xxv. 39; xxv. 54). In any case the punishment was very severe. The point to be insisted on is, that all sin must necessarily be punished. If you cut your finger you suffer pain. If you knock your head against a wall you suffer pain. **Just as surely will every sin meet with its own punishment.** (This ought to be explained very fully, and in connection with the next paragraph.)

IV. **The Prayer and the Answer** (vv. 26, 27).—In the extremity of his terror, in the horror of his punishment, this man promises to do what he knew was an impossibility. He could not pay the debt. We need not wonder at him uttering such wild words at such a time. His pleasant home to be broken up, not only himself but his wife and helpless children to be sold into slavery; instead of a pleasant and luxurious home,—brutal work, the taskmaster's lash, remorse, mental torture. No wonder his soul was filled with horror. His evident terrible suffering so affected the king, that he forgave him all the debt. This was not because the man deserved it in the very least, but because the king had compassion; —**he was freely forgiven everything.** What a wonderful picture of God's loving, boundless compassion! We need only to be truly penitent and we are sure of God's full forgiveness. He has both the will and the power to free us wholly from this terrible load of sin (compare Exod. xxxiv. 6; 2 Chron. xxx. 9; Neh. ix. 17; Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 15).

V. **This Servant's Treatment of his Fellow-servant.**—When any one does you a kindness, you are grateful, are you not? When you receive a very handsome present, you are not only grateful to the person who gave it to you, you also feel, for the time, kindly disposed to everybody. Read vv. 28-30, and you will see that this man did not act in this way. He had just been the recipient of a very large gift (v. 27), which ought to have made him very tender to the faults of others; but it only seemed to have made him more cruel. As he went out from the presence of his lord—*immediately after* he himself had received so large a gift—he met a fellow-servant who owed him a trifle. Just as he had fallen at his lord's feet, this man now fell down at his. Surely he will remember the wonderful com-

passion that had just been shown to himself! But no! using personal violence, he demanded payment; and as this poor man had not the money, mercilessly cast him into prison. We are all agreed in thinking that this man acted very badly—so badly that we wonder how he could do it. *But have we never acted in the same way—manifested the same spirit?* We are being constantly told of God's goodness to us, of the Fatherly love and care with which He surrounds us, of the forbearing way in which He treats us, and yet we often act harshly and unfeelingly to others; we *demand* trifles from others, while God has freely forgiven us enormous sums. We may think it clever and manly to cause others to suffer, but it is not so, neither is it Christian. Ought not the aspiration of the hymn to be the guide of our lives?—

'Lord, as to Thy dear cross we flee,
And plead to be forgiven,
So let Thy life our pattern be,
And form our souls for heaven.'

VI. **Punishment overtakes the impenitent Sinner** (vv. 31-35).—There is a sense of justice in the heart of most men. Such wickedness as that of this man is seldom treated lightly. His fellow-servants were horrified at his wickedness. He had acted so cruelly that they determined to bring him to punishment. **How grieved his lord must have been!** There was now nothing for him but the **extremity** of punishment (v. 34). He had failed to forgive, and therefore he could not be forgiven (Jas. ii. 13). The being forgiven much does not always make us forgiving. **The way in which we act to others is a sure proof as to whether we have or have not sought and found the forgiveness of God.**

LESSONS

1. God forgives us the debt we cannot pay Him.
2. But He requires of us that we copy Him, in forgiving others any wrong done to us.

XL.—SIGHT RESTORED TO MAN BORN BLIND

John ix.

Introduction.—In the previous chapter Jesus has proclaimed Himself the light of the world (John viii. 12). He has been setting forth that great truth in the temple. But he has left it, fleeing from the threats and violence of the Jews, who cast stones at Him, and now He is to give an illustration of His great saying, 'I am the Light of the world.'

Sketch of Lesson.—In Eastern cities, even more than in our own country, beggars station themselves beside the thoroughfares, to appeal to the sympathy of the passers-by. One of the commonest sights of any large city is a blind beggar standing near some thoroughfare, and by his generally miserable appearance appealing to the sympathy of all. In Jerusalem the entrances to the temple were favourite resorts of such beggars. Jesus now passed out of the temple, calm as if there were no danger near, even although His enemies had just attempted His life. **No personal danger was ever allowed to interfere with the due performance of Christ's work.** He stopped to look at a blind man—no doubt stationed there to beg (Acts iii. 2). His own danger does not make Him heedless of this man's misery. The sight of it appealed very powerfully to His sympathy. **He will cure him, He will restore his eyesight, and infinitely better, He will give him a glimpse of heaven's light.** Perhaps the giving so much to this poor helpless man eased His own sorrow!

I. **The Question of the Disciples** (vv. 1-4).—This question of the disciples (v. 2) gave expression to a popular belief among the Jews, that every affliction was the special punishment of some particular sin. It is no doubt the truth that all suffering is the result of sinning; but we get into a terrible maze of error when, as the friends of Job did, we act upon the belief that every calamity we suffer from is due to some special sin of our own. If that were so, it would be easy to determine the righteous and the wicked, and act accordingly. As a matter of fact we *know* that the wicked often escape much trial that the righteous undergo. God's training of individual souls cannot be explained by any hard and fast rule like that. As this man was *born* blind, his blindness could not be the punishment of his own sin. *It is just because God loves us that He often causes us to suffer, just as this man's blindness was used to quicken his spiritual life* (v. 3).

II. **The man cured** (vv. 5-7).—A strong expression for Christ to use in the presence of this man born blind (v. 5). It would not escape his attention, as the hearing of the blind is very acute, the loss of one sense quickening the others. What could it mean? No doubt it was said to inspire faith in Himself. As in other cases (Lessons XXXV., XXXVIII.), this man's faith was proved before he was cured (v. 6). There was a popular belief among the ancients that saliva cured diseases of the eyes, while we are not without examples of a belief in the medicinal value of clay. As Elisha bade Naaman go and bathe seven times in the Jordan (2 Kings v.), so was a like test

applied to the faith of this man. Unlike Naaman, he does not hesitate. He must have believed in Christ, for **he obeys at once.** Picture him groping his way to the healing pool, eagerly hurrying on with an assured hope in his heart. See him kneeling down and bathing his eyes with the fresh pure water, and then! what was that wonderful vision stretching out before him? His loftiest flight of imagination had given him no idea of the beauty which had been so long hid from him. Note also the change in the man himself—his eyes, the windows of the soul, are now lighting up his face. He seems to be another man.

III. **The Curiosity of his Neighbours** (vv. 8-12).—So great was the change in his appearance that his neighbours hardly knew him (v. 9). They could hardly believe that the bright, happy, self-reliant man was the blind beggar they had known so long. They were full of curiosity to know the reason of this wonderful change—how those long sightless eyes were now beaming with bright intelligence. He is eager to gratify their curiosity—tells them at once how it all happened (v. 11). All the more eager must he have been to spread abroad the name of his benefactor, seeing that not only was the old, dull, cheerless life gone for ever, but also he had been brought into touch with 'the Light of the world.' His change of heart was as sudden as the opening of his eyes, but it was complete. [Explain the meaning of conversion, and the urgent need of it in every case.]

IV. **This Man a fearless Witness for Christ** (vv. 13-27).—This man's confident statement puzzled his neighbours. It was evident that something strange had happened, and they must get to the bottom of it. Why? Because they hated Jesus. They therefore brought him before the judges, but to them he told the same story (v. 15). They care little for this poor man; what they do care about is,—that he proclaimed Christ as his healer. As in the case of the impotent man who was healed (chap. v. 12), they now seek to rouse the anger of the people against Him. They seize upon the fact that the miracle was done on the Sabbath (v. 16). The judges did not agree as to the character of Christ, but those hostile to Him would not be turned from their purpose, enraged as they were at the faith of the man who had been cured. They must examine into it more closely. They call his parents as witnesses. The action of the parents is very disappointing (vv. 20, 21). They shirk all responsibility, deny all knowledge of the wonderful cure, and the reason is given in v. 22. One would have imagined that they would have acted differently, but they dreaded the power of the Pharisees—the misery of expulsion from the synagogue. [Explain this by excommunication as practised in the Church of Rome.] But the man himself dreaded nothing in his loyalty to his new Master. **His was the true martyr's spirit.** Whatever happened to him he would confess his faith in the great Healer. In the face of these frowning judges, how nobly he speaks out! He declares Jesus is a prophet (v. 17), and no sinner, for He worshippeth God and doeth God's will (v. 31). He confessed that he knew little about Christ, but what he did know had determined him to be one of His followers. **No one but a good man could act as He had done** (v. 27), and therefore he was already His disciple.

V. **His Discipleship begins with Persecution** (vv. 28-34).—His steadfast faith is met with reviling (v. 28). These unjust judges could not shake

his faith, but they could so disgrace their office as to sneer and scoff at him for his belief in, his loyalty to the Saviour who had done so much for him. **This kind of suffering is often inflicted upon those who really try to be good, and is sometimes very ill to bear. Surely you are not guilty of it!** Christ says that those who thus suffer are blessed (Matt. v. 11). Then they did to him what his parents were frightened would be done to them (v. 22). They cast him out (v. 34). They would not allow him to come to the temple to worship God. Treatment like this the disciples of Christ may ever expect, but read John xvi. 33.

VI. **The Reward of his Faith.**—Jesus sought him out and helped him to a more assured faith. When the question (v. 35) is put to him, true to his innocent, straightforward nature, he asks for more knowledge. He had never seen Christ—had only heard His voice; but the moment he learns the true character of the Healer, he falls down in adoring reverence before Him. His change of heart was as sudden as the opening of his eyes, but it was complete. **How soon did the reward of his faith come to him! He was received into the number of his Master's disciples.**

LESSONS

1. **We must all be converted before we can really give ourselves to a life of Christian service.** Our happiness here and hereafter depends upon our being able to say truthfully, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'

2. **The true servant of Christ is never ashamed of his Master.**—No harm or loss or suffering of any kind will make the true Christian deny his Master.

TO THE TEACHER

Special attention should be given to the central truth contained in this lesson—the change of heart that was evident in the man after his eyes had been opened. The darkness had also been dispelled from his spiritual vision, for he saw in Christ something more than a mere healer of bodily disease. This change of heart must be explained and pressed upon the attention of the scholars as needful for every one of them.

LESSONS

ON

THE LIFE, TEACHING, AND WORKS OF OUR LORD

SECOND PART

I.—PARABLE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John x. 1-18

Introduction.—If we remember that this lesson is very closely connected with the last, we will understand its meaning better. It was the way in which the Pharisees had treated the man who had been born blind, which caused Christ to describe them as *false shepherds.* In the Old Testament (Ezek. xxxiv. ; Zech. xi.), as in the New, the close connection between the shepherd and his sheep is often used as an illustration of the connection that *ought* to exist between the people and their teachers and leaders. In the East, the duties of the shepherd are different from what they are in our country. There, he goes before them,—they follow him, each answering to its name. There—he often suffers great hardships in procuring food for them, in defending them from the ravages of wild beasts, and all this gives him a deep interest in every member of his flock. When Jesus saw the people untaught and uncared for, He thought of them as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. ix. 36). Those who ought to have been good shepherds to them, cared only for their own selfish pleasures, and thought of them only as fit subjects for robbery and oppression (Matt. xxiii. 4).

I. **The difference between true and false Shepherds** (vv. 1-6).—Compare the description here given between true and false shepherds. The true shepherd enters in by the door of the fold,—he is the friend of the sheep,—he wants only to feed and protect them ; he speaks to them, knows every one of them, calls each by its own name, leads them out, and they follow him, because they know his voice and trust him implicitly. How differently does the false shepherd act ! He creeps stealthily into the fold in a way and at a time when the sheep do not expect him. He does not speak until they are in his power ; he preys upon and destroys them. The Pharisees were sorely puzzled at these words ; they did not understand them (v. 6). *They probably suspected something,* but they could hardly believe that He would liken them to thieves and robbers. [Recall their treatment of the blind man cured (John ix. 16, 28, 34), and contrast their harshness with the kindness of Jesus (John ix. 31-38).]

II. **Christ claims to be the door of the Sheepfold.**—The Pharisees did not yet understand Christ's meaning. What He had already said referred to shepherds in general. He now by this further illustration seeks to make them understand that *good shepherds* must be in entire sympathy with *Him and His work.* How does He explain this ?—'*I am the Door of the sheep.*' The sheep can get into the fold for rest and security *only* through the door ; they come back through the door when they go to pasture. By the same means do the good shepherds go in and out in their care of the sheep. *A good door is a necessity of a safe sheepfold.* Christ's

meaning is plain. A true minister will not preach about himself; a good teacher will not tell his scholars about himself. All such preach and teach the truth as taught by Jesus, while they strive to bring all to Him. There is no salvation in any other (Acts iv. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 11). Just as the sheep cannot get into the fold except through the door, so it is only through Christ that we can be saved. Teachers who serve any other master than Christ are false teachers. *They are true only in so far as they teach Christ.*

III. **Christ claims to be the Good Shepherd.**—Remembering the qualities of the good shepherd, has Christ merited this title which He claims? Let us try to answer this question. (*a*) He has provided for us the freshest and greenest pastures (Ps. xxiii.); He has given to us all that we need (Matt. vi. 33); He has given us food which endureth unto everlasting life (John vi. 27). (*b*) He protects us from our enemies (Ps. xli. 2; xcvii. 10; cxxi. 7). Under His care, **nothing—no one**—can harm us (vv. 28, 29). His love is ever surrounding us (Rom. viii. 35). (*c*) He tries to keep us from straying into danger, and even after we have wilfully strayed, He seeks for us, and with loving, persuasive words tries to bring us back to safety and happiness. Remember His beautiful parable of *the lost sheep* (Luke xv. 4-8); remember His treatment of Zacchæus (Luke xix. 10) and the woman which was a sinner (Luke vii. 37-50); remember how He companied with the lost ones and sought to make them ashamed of their bad life, while He inspired them with strong effort after goodness. We have all strayed like lost sheep, and He is ever working to bring us back into the fold of a holy life. (*d*) He knows His sheep and they know Him (v. 14). He even knows us all by name, and has a *personal interest* in us and love for us (Isa. xliii. 1). If we overcome, He will confess our names before His Father (Rev. iii. 5). Many other texts could be easily quoted to show Christ's deep interest in us and love for us, His intimate knowledge of all our wants and weaknesses, His unwearied working to make us strong and pure and good. And as He knows His sheep so do they know Him (2 Tim. i. 12). Those who love Christ will obey Him; they will do what they know He loves, and shun what He dislikes. Explain that this is not always the easy matter it seems. **As Christ suffers in protecting us from evil, so do we suffer in trying to drive it out of our hearts.** But if we would be the sheep of the *Good Shepherd*, we must listen to His voice and obey it.

> 'The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
> And worship only Thee.'

IV. **Christ is the Pattern and Example of all good Shepherds.**—How is it that He is so much greater than all others? vv. 11, 15 tell us, '*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*' David, in his encounters with the lion and the bear (1 Sam. xvii. 34 35), risked his life for his flock. Many other good shepherds have no doubt done the same. There is, however, this great difference between them and Christ—that *He laid it down of His own free will* (v. 18); *also that He laid it down that He might take it again* (vv. 17, 18); *also that He laid it down that His sheep might have more abundant life* (v. 10). **Is there not here the exhibition of a love that**

is very wonderful? The seventeenth verse tells us of the great love which God the Father has for God the Redeemer,—because He willingly laid down His life for the salvation of mankind. The Father's love for the Son was deepened, because He cheerfully undertook that humiliating work—that work which loaded Him with suffering; because He willingly bore the cross before He wore the crown (Phil. ii. 8, 9). That life was laid down for His sheep—His strayed sheep. We sinners have deserved something very different, *for the wages of sin is death*; but Christ's atonement has been accepted (1 Pet. ii. 24), and now the way into the fold of His love is clear before us.

LESSONS

1. **Are we sure that we know Christ?**—He knows us and wants us to know Him. He loves us and wants us to love Him. When He has done so much for us, we ought to do something for Him.

2. **He deserves more than our gratitude,—He claims our loving service.**—It is easy *to say* that we have Christ and wish to serve Him, but the *saying* ought ever to be followed by the *doing*.

3. **If we are Christ's sheep, we ought to do our best to bring others within the fold.**

TO THE TEACHER

The teacher can make this lesson effective by drawing upon knowledge of the ways of Scottish shepherds. Those who wish to obtain a clearer knowledge of the position of the shepherd in Palestine and the East should read, if possible, a beautiful sermon by the late Rev. F. W. Robertson of Brighton (*Sermons*, vol. ii., sermon xx.)

II.—JESUS AND MARTHA AND MARY

Luke x. 38-42

Introduction.—In this lesson we get a little glimpse of that home at Bethany which Christ delighted to visit now and then. The gospels tell us far more about the *public* than the *private* life of Christ. And while it is right that that should be so, it is very pleasant to get such a glimpse of His private life as we have here,—to know that there was a home, in which beat loving, sympathetic hearts, where He could have that unrestrained friendly intercourse which is so precious to all. It is often recorded that Christ withdrew from the turmoil of His public life to enjoy communion with His Father,—to a solitary place, a desert, a mountain side for prayer. And while we all recognise the fitness of such communions, somehow this incident brings Christ closer to us, bringing into prominent relief, as it does, the essential humanity of the Son of man. In a few lines the attractive scene is placed before us. The hearty welcome, the anxiety to make Him feel at home, the preparations for entertaining Him, the different characters of the sisters, the opposite ways in which both show their devotion to their Lord, all form a homelike, an ever-memorable picture.

Sketch of Lesson.—It is very pleasant to visit our friends, especially when we know that they care for us and make us welcome. You all enjoy getting away from home duties, and everything with which you are quite familiar, to spend a holiday with friends at a distance. The very change makes you feel happier; to see strange but kindly faces makes you feel brighter; the food you get seems to taste sweeter. These visits of Jesus to His friends at Bethany must have been to Him a great delight, comfort, and strength. He was on very intimate terms there (read John xi. 1-5). He loved all its members very dearly, as they loved Him. For a little, putting away from Him the hardness of His public life, the suspicion and hatred with which so many regarded Him, the real danger which ever surrounded Him, when He made one of this home circle, He knew the preciousness of disinterested human love.

I. **The Friendship of Jesus a very precious Possession.**—The family at Bethany possessed it, rejoiced in it, and valued it. How dear He was to the two sisters is evident from the way they now received Him. How dear he was to Lazarus, John tells us (John xi.) How privileged these sisters were to have Jesus as a **family friend**, to be allowed to minister to His wants, to converse with Him, unknowingly to be taught by Him! They must have been good, or they would have had no pleasure in His society; they must have been striving after the godly, unselfish life, or they could not have been inspired by His heavenly wisdom. We cannot see Christ with the bodily eye, or hear His sweet converse as these sisters did; but He can be as truly our family friend. **And He will be so if we wish it** (John xv. 14). We have His good example, His holy life, His heavenly wisdom, as our very own. *In the home where these are valued, where all the members are trying to make Christ their friend,* every pleasure is sweetened, every care is lightened, every duty is

hallowed. Home becomes sweet, sweet home; the family circle the most precious spot on earth. **Every one can help to nurture and purify family life; but it can be done only through the friendship of Jesus** (John xv. 14).

'One there is, above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end.
They who once His kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love.'

II. **How glad the Sisters were to see Jesus!**—This is very evident. They wanted Him to feel at home, to enjoy a short rest from hardship and care. They hasten to prepare food for Him; they gladly give Him of their best. The sisters had very different characters, but both were inspired by devotion to Jesus. Although that devotion was shown in very different ways, yet it was as real in the one as the other. Martha shows her gladness by hurrying and bustling about to prepare the meal—to make everything comfortable. She could not think of her beloved guest as weary and hungry, without doing her best to relieve His necessities. To be in the presence of Jesus, to listen to His converse, was joy to Mary. She had been missing Him so much,—His guiding counsel, His inspiring wisdom,—and now that He was there, again speaking to her of those things she loved, **her joy was full. Jesus often visits us,**—too often He finds the door of our hearts shut against Him, but He knocks, and waits until we hear Him (Rev. iii. 20). He is continually offering us priceless blessings and pressing them on our acceptance (Matt. xi. 28-30). Should not the youngest make a close friend for life of Jesus? He loved us and gave Himself for us. He said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Mark x. 14). Is it not to Him you pray—

'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee'?

III. **Martha's Complaint** (v. 40).—The harmony of the meeting is now broken in upon. Martha, who is troubled about her household cares,—perhaps the preparations were not going on as well as she wished,—came suddenly up to Christ and complained of her sister. She thought that she was being very ill-used in being allowed to do all the work, while her sister was sitting in quiet converse with their loved guest. The active, housewifely spirit of Martha could not understand the quiet, restful spirit of Mary. It fretted her, made her impatient, feel that Mary had no interest in what she was so earnest about. Differences of the same kind had probably arisen before; her remonstrances had had no good effect, and therefore she appealed to Christ in the hope that He might have more influence with her. Had she not been troubled, perhaps irritated, she might have seen that the greatest kindness on Mary's part was to give her all her own way in this matter, in which she was so much interested. This complaint of Martha's arose, not from any want of love to her sister, but from her want of knowledge. Mary's character was so different from her own that she neither understood nor had any forbearance with it. She did not think that her

bustling, active character was as great a trial to Mary. **But different as they are, both are the true friends and followers of Christ.** With entirely different characters, they had entirely different notions as to how best to entertain Christ; but each was as zealous as the other in her efforts to entertain Him in the best possible way. Different people look at the same things and the same truths from so many standpoints, owing to the endless variety of nature, disposition, etc., that there ought to be great charity in all our judgments,—great forbearance in our treatment of others.

IV. **How Jesus treated Martha's Complaint** (vv. 41, 42).—(*a*) *He first tenderly rebukes her.* The repeated name shows the love and tenderness and solicitude with which He regarded her (Luke xxii. 31; Acts ix. 4). This fretting about household work had made her impatient and unjust to her sister. She was *careful and troubled*; a right enough spirit in its own place, but apt to arrogate all wisdom and every virtue to itself. Elsewhere Christ rebukes such a spirit (Matt. vi. 25); so Paul (1 Cor. vii. 32). (*b*) *He then shows her how unjust her complaint is,*—'*One thing is needful.*' The world's work must be done; each one has a part to do, and must do that part to the best of his ability. Every period of life has its own work, while it is imperative that that work should be done at the proper time. But there is other work which we neglect at our peril,—such work as is indicated by Christ in Matt. vi. 33; xvi. 26. *No worldly work, however important or clamant, must be allowed to take the place of that work.* 'Mary chose the good part,'—the spiritual side of her nature was more fully developed. She cared little for worldly things. She laboured for that meat which endured unto everlasting life (John vi. 26). God was her portion (Ps. lxxiii. 26). The good work had been well begun in her (Phil. i. 6). She was being kept by the power of God (1 Pet. i. 5).

LESSON

'One thing is needful' to make life happy and useful—an interest in Christ, His life, His death, His words. Let us see that we do not miss it.

III.—PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke x. 25-37

Introduction.—In our last lesson Jesus was presented to us as the family friend, who, even in the sacredness of the family circle, did not forget the special work which had brought Him to this earth. By loving rebuke and clear explanation of the possibility of two persons of opposite temperaments being equally faithful to His service, He left behind a sweetening and purifying influence in the lives of both Martha and Mary. In this lesson we have Him teaching the essential brotherhood of mankind. Few have read this parable without being impressed not only with its beauty and the vividness of its description, but also with the boldness of its conception in making to a Jewish audience a Samaritan the type of true charity. It teaches impressively that we are to do all the good we can to our fellow-men, not because they are relatives, friends, or have been kind to us, but because they are our brethren.

Sketch of Lesson.—Christ's teaching was a great surprise to those who heard Him. He taught them to do what they had never thought of doing before. They were not to think altogether of their own happiness, comfort, pleasure, but also must they think of what was due to others. They are not only to love those who are kind to them, *but they are to do good to and love their enemies.* They watched Him closely to find out whether He acted what He preached. They often tried to put Him in the wrong. The clever Pharisees often asked Him questions to find out whether He was a deceiver or not, although sometimes their questions were an honest effort to obtain information (see Mark x. 17-27 ; Luke xi. 52-54). Young people are very fond of asking questions of older people. They want to know the meaning of everything. Quite right as long as knowledge is wanted. Quite wrong when questions are asked only to annoy. Nothing more irritating to both old and young than to be pestered with absurd, silly questions. In this lesson we have a clever man asking questions of Christ to tempt Him, *i.e. to test Him,—to find out whether He was what He professed to be.* He asked these questions, not necessarily for a bad motive, perhaps to show off his own cleverness (v. 29).

I. **A very important Question and Answer** (vv. 25-27).—Though perhaps not much harm meant, this question was asked from a wrong motive, and therefore wrong. The young ruler had asked the same question (Mark x. 17), but animated by a right spirit—that made all the difference (compare Acts xvi. 30, 31). Note how Christ makes this very clever man answer himself (v. 26). That is a foolish question for you, a lawyer, to ask. Your business is to answer to others the very question you have put to Me. What is your answer to your own question? Put in that way, the lawyer was compelled either to answer or to seem ignorant of what it was his business to know (v. 27). It was the business of the lawyers to teach and explain the law of Moses, just like the Scribes. His answer is good—a short, correct summary of the law (compare Deut. vi. 5 ; x. 12 ; Lev. xix. 18). He understood the letter of the law per-

fectly, *but was ignorant of its spirit.* God is to be loved first and best, our neighbour as ourselves. No taking advantage of our neighbour in any shape or form whatever. What we must give to and do for ourselves, we must be ready to give to and do for others. A correct answer, **knowledge all right, spirit all wrong.** These principles must not only be known, but acted upon (John xiii. 17; Rom. x. 5). Knowledge is good, but if it is to be of any use, it must be followed by action. Try, and you will find action not so easy as it seems. Ability to do comes only after repeated effort to do. It is when we try to *live* the pure and holy life that we realise the power of sin and the difficulty of overcoming it. No sin ought to be regarded as of no consequence. Try to master it; then its power is known.

II. **The Lawyer attempts to justify Himself.**—How? By asking another question. He could not deny the truth of Christ's words (v. 28), yet he wished to justify his past conduct and his present character, as the Pharisees were fond of doing (xvi. 15). He had been a good neighbour, as far as the letter of the law went (Lev. xix. 18), but he was quick to see that Christ's teaching meant something more, and *perhaps* because his conscience was awakened by the teaching of Christ, he wished really to become a true disciple. Jesus took the Old Testament law, which had been so well stated by the lawyer himself, and filled it full with His own Spirit—the Spirit of the **Saviour of mankind** (Matt. v. 17). He answers the question by giving a wonderfully appropriate illustration of His meaning.

III. **The Parable.**—A traveller on a lonely, dangerous, steep, rugged road. Such the character of road from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of twenty-one miles. Infested with cruel robbers,—did not even spare life. **Hence called 'bloody way.'** The traveller has been attacked by these men (v. 30). No thanks to the robbers that he was not killed outright. Soon after a priest approached, who had just been serving God in the temple at Jerusalem. How fortunate for this poor half-dead man that this professed servant of God is so near! He who was commanded by the law to be kind even to animals (Deut. xxii. 1-4) will surely speedily help a fellow-creature in such dire distress. But (v. 31) heartless, utterly heartless! *But, like the lawyer, he no doubt tried to justify himself.* Robbers still near,—*he* might be attacked; he had no means of helping the man; if seen near might be accused of the outrage. **Miserably selfish—inhuman reasons all of them!** He utterly neglected the teaching both of the law (Deut. xxii. 4) and the prophets (Isa. lviii. 7). What did the lawyer think of that man—that minister of God—as a good neighbour? Shortly after another traveller; this time a Levite—a man set apart to the service of God from his birth. *His* conduct identically the same. *No doubt he too tried to justify himself.* Still another passenger; this time a hated Samaritan, from whom he would not have accepted help if he had been able to refuse it. Alas for the poor wounded man! All hope now gone! But the moment the Samaritan catches sight of him, he did not content himself with looking coldly at him, as the Levite had done; he has compassion on him. He does not think of the danger, the trouble, the delay —although he was far from home—or the expense. **He at once helps him all he can.** See how tenderly he dresses the wounds (vv. 34, 35).

This Samaritan, hated as his race was by the poor sufferer (John iv. 9), might have pleaded the same excuse as the other two, *and with much better reason.* But this man fully understood the meaning of the word 'neighbour,'—saw only a wounded, suffering fellow-creature, **and had compassion.**

IV. **The Meaning of the Parable.**—By the question of v. 36 Christ compels the clever lawyer to answer his own question of v. 29. How different the conduct of these three men in exactly the same circumstances! If all had acted in the same way, the Samaritan would have been least to blame. There was no difficulty as to who was the **good neighbour.** '*Go, and do thou likewise*' is the short, pointed command with which Christ finishes His lesson. *Keeping the law is better than knowing it. We must not only know the right, but do it.*

LESSONS

1. **Self-love too much the ruling passion.**—We care for our own happiness, pleasure, success, far more than we ought to do,—generally to the exclusion of any very lively interest in others.

2. **Self-love must be overcome by loving and helping others.**—The only way we can become unselfish is by trying to help others. Try it and you will find how pleasant it is.

3. **Never forget that we are all God's children, and that all have the same claim on His love and care.**—Ought not that to make us very helpful to and very sympathetic with each other?

TO THE TEACHER

This passage ought to have a special interest for Sunday School teachers because it shows how Christ taught. He first illustrates the truth, as we see, and then he sends home the application by a pointed question. Teachers will find in almost every book describing a tour in Palestine graphic descriptions of the steep and trying road from Jerusalem to Jericho, but none better than the late Dr. Norman Macleod's 'Eastward' (*Good Words*, September 1865).

IV.—PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG-TREE

Luke xiii. 6-9

Introduction.—As this lesson is so very short, it will be better to read from the beginning of the chapter, more especially as the parable was given to combat the prevalent belief there expressed, that exceptional suffering is always the direct result of exceptional sinning. Painful as the incidents mentioned in these verses are, there is no other historical record of them, although it is well known that, about this period, wild rioting often occurred at Jerusalem during the feasts. It has, therefore, been justly inferred that such were of frequent occurrence, and well known to those present. Those who brought the news to Christ evidently believed that this mingling of their blood with their sacrifices proved that these poor victims were very abandoned sinners. The Jews held to such a belief (Lesson XL., First Part.) Christ here seeks to uproot this error—by exposing the sinfulness of such harsh judgments—by giving a personal application to all such calamities. *Being sinners ourselves, as well as those who have so suffered, we ought to be thankful that we have escaped a like fate, while our escape ought to make us more earnest and faithful in the discharge of every duty.*

Sketch of Lesson.—Bad news travels quickly. What an eager interest all have in each other's misfortunes! They seem to be talked about with a peculiar pleasure. Not because we have all bad hearts and rejoice in each other's misfortunes, but because our own escape from them makes us imagine that we are better than the sufferers. **The very same spirit which animated those who brought bad news to Christ** (v. 1). We may not mean to do wrong by encouraging such a spirit, still it is very wrong. Some people suffer far more than others, who, we are sure, are very good people, and we ought to sympathise with and comfort them rather than blame them. We cannot understand the meaning of these sufferings, but we can *believe* that God is doing all for the greatest good (Amos iii. 6). And as we know that all suffering is the result of sinning, either by ourselves or others, **our clear duty is to be good ourselves, help to make others good, and thus lessen the suffering.** Christ tells this parable to enforce this truth.

I. **God's Goodness to every one of His Children** (v. 6).—No vineyards in this country,—climate too cold,—grapes grown in hothouses. But all have seen a well-kept garden, walks trim and neat, no weeds to be seen, different kinds of crops each carefully tended, every bush and tree pruned and nourished according to its kind, each one planted in the place most suitable for fruit-bearing. This fig-tree had been planted in a sheltered corner of this vineyard, where, well tended and nourished, it ought to have borne fruit. Christ thus reminds the Jews how good God had been to them. They had been blessed above all other nations,—had been planted in the most sheltered corner of God's vineyard (Isa. v. 2; Ps. lxxx. 8-11). *His great goodness was not only to the Jews as a nation, but to the Jews as individuals*, as symbolised by this solitary fig-tree being cared for quite as

much as the vines which surrounded it. **God cares and watches over every individual life.** No one lives in a corner too hidden or out of the way to escape His notice. He watches over all, carefully tends all, gives to every one his proper training.

'My health and friends and parents dear
To me by God are given;
I have not any blessing here
But what is sent from heaven.'

II. **God's just Expectation often disappointed** (vv. 6, 7).—Fruit was expected, search made for it, in the just hope that some return would be given. **The nature of the tree was to bear fruit;** the exceptionally good treatment it had received, the best reason for the expectation of a heavy crop. What a disappointment! No fruit,—nothing but leaves. Favourable position, abundant nourishment, careful training, all in vain. Christ's meaning and application very plain. All had received many blessings, many privileges,—the time of grace had been long. Had a good use been made of it? Had they enjoyed the goodness of God carelessly and sinfully? Or had they been bearing the fruit of true repentance? If they had not, they would not escape (Hosea ix. 10; Jer. xxiv. 3; Heb. ii. 3). God very often disappointed when He comes to see the use we are making of His gifts. **It is our nature to bear good fruit,** for we are God's children, gifted largely, blessed abundantly, cared for continuously. We need to be prepared for those times of visitation. [Illustrate by preparation for a school examination or time of apprenticeship to a trade.]

III. **Even the severest of God's Judgments always just** (v. 7).—How vexed the owner of the vineyard was that this fig-tree should continue fruitless! His regret is apparent in his words to the vine-dresser. He might have simply ordered the tree to be destroyed, without giving the vine-dresser an opportunity of speaking. He *knows* that it should be cut down, and yet he gives the order so very unwillingly. For three years he had been disappointed,—always *promising*, but never *bearing* fruit. Its own fruitlessness was not his only loss. It was wasting the time of the vine-dresser, shading the sun, wasting the soil, so that the other trees were injured. Not only useless itself, but a cause of fruitlessness in the trees near it. Therefore the sentence is eminently a just one, '*Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?*' **All have an influence for good or evil upon those with whom they associate** (Rom. xiv. 7). Our lives are not our own; they also belong to others. We have the power of making others happy or miserable. The youngest child helps to make a home happy, or the reverse. A boy can add to or take away from the happiness of his companions by being pleasant to or always quarrelling with them. God knows whether we are doing good or evil; according to our conduct will be His judgment. He will come to us year after year, and if we are not trying to live good lives, in some way or other we must suffer. Is not this a very appropriate prayer for a child wishing to be good?—

'Fain I would to Thee be brought;
Blessed Lord, forbid it not;
In the kingdom of Thy grace
Give a little child a place.'

IV. **The ever-ready Intercessor** (v. 8).—How eagerly the vine-dresser intercedes for this tree he has tended so carefully, and yet been so disappointed with! He cannot yet believe that so much fair promise is to end in nothing. He pleads earnestly that one other chance may be given to it. In his eager pleading that the tree be spared, he takes some of the blame to himself by implication. Perhaps he had not done to it everything that he might have done. If only it could be spared another year, he would redouble his exertions, he would dig holes about the roots, cast in manure, water it well, and then the result might be different. How touching is the devotion here manifested! *What a wonderfully vivid picture it presents of God's forbearance towards His people!* He had sent many an eminent vine-dresser to keep and prune His vineyard, and plead for the prolongation of the time of probation for the fruitless trees. The patriarchs, prophets, John the Baptist, Christ Himself, the Apostles; and animating them all was the Holy Spirit. God wills not the death of any. He desires that we all should have eternal life. By His Holy Spirit, He is ever pleading with us to forsake all sin, give ourselves to His service, and know what real happiness is (Rev. iii. 20). *Shall we listen to His loving, pleading words?*

V. **The blessed Hope of Pardon and Amendment** (v. 9).—The renewed efforts of the vine-dresser may not end in getting the fig-tree to bear fruit, but, on the other hand, they may,—and then the joy of success. It is at least worth the trial. Hope of success will cause him to spare no pains. If he fail again, the tree must be destroyed. How forbearing, long-suffering God has been to all of us! Year after year we have been careless, indifferent, not troubling ourselves to be obliging, helpful, obedient, pleasant, preferring to be the opposite of all these in our utter selfishness. But time of probation will come to an end, even the power of the Intercessor cannot always avail, even the time for pardon will cease, the hope of amendment will die, and then, although our time of mercy is so much longer than we deserve, yet at the longest it is but short.

'The day of grace fleets fast away,
And none its rapid course can stay.'

LESSON

If we are not good, we are the direct cause of great harm and loss to others as well as to ourselves. We have an influence either for good or evil over all with whom we come in contact.

TO THE TEACHER

It will be well if the teacher embraces the opportunity which this solemn subject offers of faithfully pressing on the children the necessity of using well their privileges, and pleading with them, in view of the uncertainty of life, to close with the offer of mercy in Christ.

V.—PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

Luke xiv. 15-24

Introduction.—For the better understanding of our lesson to-day it will be necessary to read from the seventh verse, as this parable is a powerful illustration of Christ's discourse at the table of the Pharisee who had invited Him to a feast. It grieved Christ to see the selfishness and rudeness of those men who ought to have known better (v. 7). Although they were watching Him with jealous eyes, He does not hesitate to say right out what He thinks of their conduct. Host and guests alike were animated by a wrong spirit. He has a word of warning and admonition for each. The guests were animated by a self-assertive, overbearing spirit. He seeks to teach them true humility (vv. 8-11). The host was giving this great feast from a spirit of ostentation, and in the hope of being invited to many more such feasts in return. Christ seeks to teach him that these are not the highest motives which ought to animate him in the dispensing of his hospitality (vv. 12-14). Not that we are to imagine for a moment that Christ here forbids an interchange of hospitalities between friends and neighbours,—rather that the best hospitality is that which charitably entertains the poor. *Not much credit is due to the man who gives what he expects to get back, or much more.* God's hospitality is very different; this parable tells us who His guests are, and how they are treated.

Sketch of Lesson.—All like to be invited to a feast, to enjoy the good things kind friends have prepared. Enjoyment very real, because appetites are good and spirits high, and because what is provided is better than ordinary fare. Not the least part of the pleasure is the fun and merriment which prevail. All are ready to enjoy everything; all easily moved to laughter. Sulks, black looks, ill tempers are mostly left outside the warm, bright room; all on their best behaviour. Would it not be a shame were it otherwise? Would not any approach to bad behaviour show great ingratitude to the entertainers? **This lesson tells of the rich feast God has provided for all men,**—of the happiness He not only wants all to enjoy, but presses us to receive; and also of the self-will and ingratitude and bad behaviour of many who ought to know better.

I. **The Pharisee's confident Expectation** (v. 15).—*Truth not always welcome*, nor was it at the Pharisee's table. All feel uncomfortable at the plain truths which Jesus spoke, although they could not be denied. One of the guests comes to the rescue; gives utterance to a great truth, but in a light, free, and easy way, which told of his ignorance of its importance. What a false idea of the kingdom of God he had! He was a son of Abraham, had conformed to the Law, believed in the prophets, and being such he never thought that he could be excluded from it. His self-complacency arose from his absolute trust that this blessedness was secured to him. But he must be taught that something more is needed. He must become a true son of Abraham, a spiritual son, whose whole life must be in sympathy with the spirit of unselfish goodness (Matt. vi. 32). That he and others might

know the only way in which true citizenship in the kingdom of God can be obtained, Christ tells them this parable.

II. **The pressing Invitation** (vv. 16, 17).—The Pharisees thought themselves sure of enjoying the blessedness of the kingdom of God, on account of their descent from Abraham. **Now was the time to show their true sonship.** This great feast was prepared; John the Baptist had preached repentance; Jesus, the Messiah, was with them, telling them the truth and beseeching them to accept it, *and they were paying no attention.* Following their own custom, now that the feast is ready, they are reminded of their engagement. '*All things are now ready.*' **Now that is God's message to all His children.** At first only to the Jews, **now to all** (x. 8, 9; Matt. iii. 1, 2). Neither the invitation is wanting, nor the welcome when accepted, **but this feast can only be enjoyed by those who have the right appetite.** Like the Pharisees we *generally* take it for granted that we will go and enjoy that heavenly feast, **but if sick and ill with the disease of sin** we must absent ourselves. Will each one try and find out **why** he cannot accept this cordial and pressing invitation?

III. **The Nature of the Excuses** (vv. 18-20).—The invited guests have no desire for this spiritual food, and therefore they cannot eat it. '*With one consent*' all are united in refusing. Different as these excuses are, they all sprang from one root—worldliness. The time of one is taken up with his farm, another has a large business connection, another has just entered into a new relationship. Excuses more or less civilly made, but *all* determined refusals. What does this Pharisee think now? The very blessedness he took for granted would be his, **he and the other invited guests will not now accept.** *The world and its interest now sufficient for them; they have no desire for heavenly food* (John xv. 24). [Explain this very simply, and illustrate by the way in which the keeping of good resolutions is put off from day to day,—*often never kept.*] When good resolutions are taken, a beginning ought to be made at once, if there is a real desire that they be kept. The artificial appetite for evil must be gradually destroyed before the natural appetite for goodness gets back its full power. Do not let us confine our efforts to talking about goodness, or ever imagine that the blessedness of heaven will come to us as a matter of course. **There is not a deadlier sin than this.** Let our talk about goodness end **always** in active effort to be good (Matt. xi. 12).

IV. **The Universality of the Gospel Message** (v. 21).—The lord was very angry, and with good reason,—his invitation despised, his feast slighted. But the prepared feast must not be wasted, guests must be got, his invitation is widely extended (v. 21). The first invited had voluntarily given away their birthright, as Esau did, and it must pass to others. Explain that this verse tells (*a*) of the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles generally, and (*b*) particularly the calling of the lost sheep of the house of Israel,—those whom the so-called good had done their best to make worse (iv. 18; Matt. xxi. 32; Mark xii. 37). The Gospel is now addressed to all. **That Christ's great work, not only to make the good better, but to bestow eternal life upon the publicans and sinners who repented.** [Illustrate by free breakfasts, etc., given to the

poor. Explain that the poor are God's children as well as the rich,—that all are invited to the Lord's table,—that goodness makes great in heaven.] Men like to entertain their equals, and if possible their superiors in social position. God's hospitality is extended to all who will accept of it, because all are His children. But note that the poor and helpless are His especial care.

V. **God's Table never full** (v. 22).—'*Yet there is room.*' Prompt obedience the right spirit to manifest. Servant goes at once, does as he is bidden, comes back immediately and reports. No one need despair of getting a share of this feast, if he only accepts the invitation (John xiv. 2). Sharply as the despisers of God's invitation are dealt with, it is because of their rebelliousness. God's mercy is yet full and free. (*a*) All are invited,—even publicans and sinners are pressed to leave their sins behind them; (*b*) the table must be filled,—no lack of hospitality there; (*c*) even strong measures are taken to fill the house with guests; and (*d*) '*yet there is room.*' Explain that if all are not Christ's servants, it is not because Christ despises their service, but because the service of another and a harder master is preferred.

VI. **The aggressive Nature of Christian Work** (v. 23).—Christ here sets His seal upon that. Not that physical force is to be used, persecution in any form, but as Timothy is exhorted (2 Tim. iv. 2). Sinners and careless must be personally dealt with, rebuked, exhorted, warned. Their spiritual eyesight is blinded by the god of the world, and effort must be made to convince them of their danger. This verse the motto of the missionary,—is the reason for his self-consecration to the good of others. *This command addressed to all.* We can all be missionaries. We can all be animated by Christ's Spirit, and by our conduct as well as by our words help to bring others to Jesus. *If every one would try to influence for good his companion, how goodness would grow!* The first invited had condemned themselves, choosing the service of the world rather than the service of Christ, therefore they could not sit at Christ's table (v. 24).

LESSONS

1. **No excuse sufficient to explain our wilful rejection of Christ's invitation.** Such excuses are very numerous, but are the result of the same spirit. They are all equally worthless and equally dangerous. Therefore don't make them, do away with the need of making them.

2. **If we neglect or treat lightly the privileges we have, they will be taken from us and given to others.** If we are not already enjoying the blessings of grace, the fault is not Christ's but our own.

'Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, joined with power;
He is able,
He is willing; doubt no more.'

VI.—PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON—FIRST PART

Luke xv. 11-24

Introduction.—Perhaps it is too much the custom, in considering this parable, to ignore the circumstances which called it forth. Nor is this to be wondered at when we think of the marvellous beauty, the pathos, the tenderness, the truth to life that are in it. It is perfect in itself, and appeals in such a powerful and attractive way to all, exhibiting as it does the unspeakable greatness of God's love to fallen man, that its surroundings are forgotten in the far-reaching truth it so plainly teaches. At the same time, by remembering its historical connection, further light is thrown upon its meaning, beauty and tenderness added to the truth it teaches. Publicans and sinners had been attracted to Christ (v. 1). Bad as they were, He encouraged them, associated with them, even ate with them. The Pharisees, who regarded the very touch of such sinners as defilement, were angry at Him because He did this (v. 2). This anger was mixed with wonder; they could not understand how such open sinners desired the society of this **holy Man.** Jesus seeks to explain this puzzling fact,—to let them know the true work of the Messiah (Matt. ix. 13). He gives a threefold illustration. The shepherd searches unweariedly for the strayed sheep, the woman does the same for her lost piece of money, because they were their own, and well worth the trouble of the search. So does the Messiah work diligently for the salvation of all those whom God had given Him, **because, if He can, He will allow not one to be lost.** And then He teaches them, *much more plainly*, their own near relationship to those poor outcasts they so much despised.

Sketch of Lesson.—How many different characters and temperaments there are in a single family! Some children are happy and contented, cheerful and obedient; others are sulky, troublesome, ill-tempered, and disobedient. Some are anxious to do everything their parents ask them, because they trust entirely in their parents' love, and seek to be worthy of that love; others are careless and wilful,—are themselves unhappy and make their parents unhappy. Parents provide a comfortable home, freely give everything they can; all which ought to be repaid in love, obedience, helpfulness. **A happy home the pleasantest spot on earth.** Our lesson to-day tells us of a home not so happy as it might have been on account of the wilfulness and waywardness of the least important of its members. It was not a large family—two sons—but one of them discontented, although he had everything to make him happy. He does not seek to overcome this bad feeling; he encourages it, until it gains complete mastery over him, and brings to him terrible suffering.

I. **The younger Son's Discontent and its Results** (vv. 12, 13).—He was discontented in what should have been to him a very happy home. He had a kind father, plenty to eat and drink, warm clothing, many pleasures. Still he was discontented. Why? *Because he was not allowed to do just what he liked.* In his ignorance he thought he knew what was best for himself, and although his father tried to keep him right, he would

not be kept right. He cared not for his father's love, despised his care, heartlessly resolved to leave him. Of course he thought his father was very hard to him, and therefore, at any cost, he must be away. He would have more freedom out of sight of home and friends to do just as he liked. And to do as he liked was what he wished. **The truest sign of sin in the heart is our self-will.** The good father does not refuse the request, made, as it probably was, on the pretence of going to live in some distant part,—a request not uncommon in the East. *See into what misery his self-will led this foolish boy.* He got his desire—freedom from restraint, liberty to do as he liked. For a little time (v. 13) shame kept him from openly showing the evil spirit that was in him, but soon that gained the mastery, and *very soon* he goes headlong in his sinful career. '*Wasted his substance in riotous living.*' No details given; these can be easily conceived. **The descent into gross wickedness is very rapid.** Fretting against the healthy home influences, longing to taste the sweets of perfect liberty—**never liberty to do greater good, always liberty to work greater evil**—discontent, disobedience, the sneering at religion and religious influences, the joining with bad companions, and so on. **Boys! never fret against the loving restraints of home, nor seek to go your own way in opposition to that of those who are older and wiser.**

II. **His utter Misery** (vv. 14-16).—His pleasure was shortlived. **There is nothing so expensive as sin. Sin makes and keeps many men poor.** Many spend their all upon selfish enjoyment. The prodigal soon '*spent all*,' but in the spending of his money he had acquired habits which were not easy to throw off. He now lived a life of sin, not so much because he desired it, as because his evil habits compelled him. No pleasure in sin now. Famine came to him at his worst, no means, bad habits, constitution weakened by excess, craving for excitement,—all that meant **utter, abject misery.** He had been impatient under the gentle restraint of a loving father, **and now he was the veriest slave,** bound by unseen fetters, which cut into his very soul. Misery was only a name before, but now! No doubt he suffered from bodily hunger, but his worst suffering arose from something else (Amos viii. 11). He was suffering sorely, but not yet enough to lead him to break off his sinful habits. The sinner must drink his bitter draught to the dregs (v. 15). Swine were unclean animals among the Jews, and the swine-herd one of the most despised of men. **And this was what self-will had brought him to,—starved, hated, spurned by all, outwardly defiled, inwardly racked with mental anguish; but still clinging to sin, even while loathing it as the cause of his misery.** No man cared for him,—alone in his wretchedness. There is no true bond of sympathy between sinners. There is no true human brotherhood except in the service of God. Sin is utterly selfish,—root and branch of it. Have you never felt very wretched after having done wrong? [When boys or girls have told a lie or done something unkind, and a voice tells them within that it is wrong, how unhappy they feel!] A good thing for you if you have!

III. **His Repentance** (vv. 17-20).—His penitence appeared when he '*came to himself*.' He had been maddened by the prospect and indulgence of his sinful pleasures. Sin had got such a hold of him that it caused him

to act as if he were out of his mind. **His sufferings caused him to see his foolishness.** These very sufferings are his best friend. When he understood that he himself was the cause of his sufferings, the remedy soon presented itself. When we begin to value ourselves at our true worth, then begins the hope of amendment, the hope of really being and doing good. Such is an all-important time in every life, when we *know* that we are not our own but God's (1 Cor. vi. 20). *Now* he remembers his father's home, the abundance there, the happiness that might have been his, had he never left it. The very thought of its purity and peace brought into bolder relief his own wretchedness. How far away it seemed, and yet, unworthy as he was, might not a corner be found for him in it,—not the son's place—he had forfeited that—but that of a servant? The hope is gladness. His resolution is taken (v. 18). No doubt he was impelled to this by his hunger and his misery, but the great thing is **he does it**—he trusts himself to his father's mercy, **and then he goes to his father in his true character** (vv. 18, 19). That showed true repentance. He confessed all. He knew that his father had loved him dearly, and he believed that that love was not all dead. There is no doubt as to the reality of God our Father's love. [Note particularly under this head, and try to explain, even to the youngest in the class, the different stages of true repentance. (*a*) The unhappiness caused by a sense of sinfulness; (*b*) the sense of utter unworthiness; (*c*) the determination to confess; (*d*) the fulness of the confession; (*e*) the yearning for and the striving after a pure and holy life.]

IV. **His free and full pardon** (vv. 20-24).—What a wonderful picture! The father much readier to bestow pardon than the son to receive it. He is waiting for him,—unhappy at his absence,—saw him a great way off,—ran to meet him,—fell on his neck,—kissed him warmly,—all ragged, footsore, disreputable as he was. Bravely does the son utter the words of repentance (v. 21), grieved at the misery he had caused that loving heart. What an unexpected reception he gets! **Not only is he forgiven, but restored to his sonship**; the son's robe, ring, shoes, all given. And then the whole household must rejoice; the fatted calf killed. Now he understands as never before the hatefulness of sin and the joy of his father's presence. No wonder, for from the death of sin he had come back to a life of holiness. Those and infinitely greater blessings are what God the Father is longing to bestow on us. Shall we not come to our right mind and accept them?

SPECIAL LESSON

The tender, forbearing, patient, unwearying, forgiving nature of God our Father's love. Turn to Him with the words of the hymn—

'Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe—
O Lamb of God, I come!'

VII.—PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON—SECOND PART

Luke xv. 25-32

Introduction.—If the first part of the parable be better understood by remembering its historical connection, much more does that hold good with reference to this second part, for the elder son is a perfect type of the self-righteous Pharisee. The comprehensive mercy, the universal call to repentance, the willingness to pardon, which this parable treats of in such a wonderfully attractive way, would have been only half taught if their great sinfulness and need of restoration to true goodness had not been forcibly brought home to these self-righteous, hypocritical Pharisees. **The real value of the parable consists in this, that it exhibits so powerfully the blessed truth, that repentance and remission are possible to unrighteous and self-righteous alike.**

Sketch of Lesson.—In our last lesson we followed the younger son through the different stages of his experience. [Question back upon his self-will; the rapidity of his downward career; the great misery he brought upon himself; finding sin better, yet habit compelling him; his sufferings the means of bringing him to repentance; the reality of that repentance; the going to ask for pardon; the free and full forgiveness he received. In some simple words give all a personal application.] This brother's character was very different. He had not been disobedient to his father, had not fretted at the restraints of home, had not given way to open sin. He valued the peace and comfort of his father's house, was helpful to him in every way, tried to relieve him from care as far as possible,—to all appearance was as good a son as man could wish to have. But he was all this, not from high principle or unselfish love to his father, but because he found it was his own interest to act in this manner. His younger brother out of the way, with his portion duly paid to him, he had no rival in his father's affection, nor any other claimant of his means, **so that in working for his father he was working for himself.** *In due time his trial came. This lesson tells us how ill he bore it.*

I. **The self-righteous Elder Brother** (vv. 25-28).—He had been at work in the fields, looking after his father's interests—*and his own.* On coming home could not understand the meaning of all this dancing and merriment, was jealous that it should be engaged in without his consent—*looked upon himself as already master.* Does not go to ask his father, as we should have expected such a dutiful son to have done; calls and asks a servant (v. 26). What had made his father's heart to dance with joy only roused his hatred. *He* had no sympathy for the poor suffering wanderer; only jealous anger at the love that had been shown him. With heart full of contempt for his brother and disrespect for his father, he turned away from his father's door. **Had this respectable elder son real communion with his good father, any more than the rebellious younger?** *Was not his love for his father mainly selfish?* He thought himself *too good* for such company, never dreaming that the presence of that wrath in his heart betrayed the presence of sin more deadly than the open sin of the prodigal.

In this elder brother the Pharisees might easily have traced a clear family likeness to themselves. They were so impressed with a belief in their own goodness, that they blamed Jesus for allowing sinners to *approach* Him. Were anger, jealousy, and contempt such feelings as they could encourage, and yet be blameless? [Illustrate by one boy despising another because he thinks that he himself is so much better and cleverer.] *True goodness never despises or is jealous, but strives to help and give credit where it is due.*

II. **The good Father** (v. 28).—His father is told of his return, anger, refusal to go into the house. He too might have been angry and resented his unfilial conduct. But no! He hurries out and *entreats* him,—seeks to win him to a better frame of mind. His joy at the prodigal's return must not be damped by the unkindness of the son who had been so much to him. This peep into his hard, selfish nature must have been very painful to the good father. He yearned for his love, and would have given up much of his work if that had been assured to him. Think how often and how earnestly does God our Father condescend to entreat us, and often with how little success (compare Luke xiii. 34).

III. **The Elder Son's Justification of his Conduct** (vv. 29, 30).—And a very pitiful justification it is. In his anger he betrays the true motives which inspired his conduct. How rude he is to his father, how contemptuous to his brother, whom he will not even acknowledge! Not '*serve father*,' but '*serve thee*.' Not '*my brother*,' but '*thy son*.' He begins by boasting of his own goodness, how perfect he had been. Then he grumbles that his services have not been acknowledged properly, although he knew well that soon *everything* would be his own. Then he bitterly blames his father for wasting his means upon this unworthy son. What a hard, mean, selfish soul does he betray himself to be possessed of! He had lived with and worked for his father, not with the spirit and loving tenderness of a son, *but as a slave*. No wonder that he has the soul of a slave, never satisfied, ever wanting what he cannot get. He cared nothing for the rich reward of the consciousness of possessing his father's love, of being permitted to be near him and comfort his declining years. Nor were his friends those of his father (v. 29). Although he had continued outwardly respectable, his heart was not in his father's house. He had not given way to gross sin, still his heart was not clean. **There is a sin of thought as well as of action, and sooner or later the action comes.** The thirtieth verse shows the real blackness of his heart,—every word full of hatred,—strong effort made to stir up his father's anger against his brother—'*thy living*.' The likeness between this self-righteous elder brother and these Pharisees is very startling. They kept the law in the letter, broke it in the spirit. The service they rendered to God was no willing service; they valued only the wages and dared to reckon with God. They boasted of their own goodness. How were they proving that goodness? *By blaming Christ for helping these poor sinners, who were their own brethren according to the flesh.* The prodigal was his own worst enemy; these men would willingly do any amount of harm to others if thereby they could save themselves. [*Apply more particularly by explaining the greatness of the sin committed when one boy does another an injury to benefit himself.*]

IV. **The Father's loving Reproof** (vv. 31, 32).—How tender he is to this selfish, heartless son! '*Son*' rather '*child*,' a more affectionate term. The bitter, revengeful, utterly selfish character which he so rudely displayed did not estrange from him his father's love. As that love had followed the prodigal in his wanderings, had grieved continuously at his absence, and had leapt up into stronger life the moment he appeared, so does he yearn over this unlovely, hypocritical nature. Both were his sons, both had the same claim on him; the happiness of both was very dear to him. The receiving the prodigal back to his father's home and his love, took nothing away from the portion of the elder brother (v. 31). The elder brother could not understand that, because his was that narrow, mean nature which circled round its own interests. He did not understand that **the more you love, the more you can love,—that the test of goodness is the amount you can give, not what you can retain.** He grudged what the younger son got because he would not believe that with this kind of riches the more you give the richer you are. '*It was meet that we should make merry and be glad.*' '*Joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*' (Luke xv. 7). Christ does not tell us what became of the elder son. We are left to conjecture. We hope he found the way to repentance as his younger brother had done. All the more bitter was the lesson to the Pharisees. While the publicans and sinners were getting into the kingdom of heaven through the door of repentance, their good opinion of themselves was keeping them out.

LESSONS

1. **Self-righteousness a very subtle, but a very dangerous sin.** It is so apt to deceive us. There is no difficulty in discovering and condemning open sin. It is difficult to unmask the hard, selfish heart when shrouded with the cloak of respectability.

2. **Harsh judgments not generally a sign of a high degree of goodness.** It is strange but true that he who judges most harshly is generally in the greatest need of pardon.

VIII.—RAISING OF LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

John xi. 1-46

Introduction.—This miracle is to be found only in John. Many explanations have been offered as to why it has been omitted by the other Evangelists, but no satisfactory one has ever yet been given. They must have known of it, for such an event could not well be concealed, more especially as it had so much to do with the hastening on of Christ's crucifixion. It is full of human interest, bringing into bold relief the motives and characters of the actors in the wonderful scene. The central figure is Jesus Christ. How far away from us He seems by the Divine power He so calmly exhibits, and yet how near He is brought by that exquisite human sympathy which He so naturally displays! How far away from us He seems, calmly uttering words of heavenly wisdom; how near when He so tenderly comforts the sorrowing sisters! But beyond the tenderness and sympathy and ready helpfulness, which assure us of His loving brotherhood, and His nearness in time of sore trouble, so clearly displayed in this lesson, *there is also taught in it the great central truth of the immortal life*,—that life which unites our souls to God. That union, if ever to be consummated, must be formed *here and now*, though strengthened and purified in the life beyond.

Sketch of Lesson.—You remember the home at Bethany, and what took place there (Lesson II., Part First). Now the inmates of that happy home were in great distress. Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, was very ill. Serious illness of one member of a family causes *all* to suffer. All become restless and unhappy, take no interest in usual work. The centre of interest is the sick-bed. All anxious to do something to relieve the sufferer. So with Lazarus. All has been done for him that the sisters could think of, but with no good effect. Only one thing remained—to tell Jesus of their trouble. *They sent to tell Him; not to ask Him to come.* Why? Because they knew that He was in great danger (v. 8). Note the thoughtful kindness. They would rather suffer than that Christ should incur risk of any kind. They believed in His power, in His great love for them, and knowing as they must have done that that power could be exercised in absence, that He had but to speak the word (Mark vii. 29, 30; John iv. 49, 50), they hoped that He would *thus* heal their brother. This evident from vv. 21 and 32.

I. **Christ works for the greatest good of all** (vv. 1-19).—He knew of the great distress in the home at Bethany: Lazarus, whom He loved, dying; the sisters longing and praying for His coming. Yet He does not hasten there, as might have been expected (v. 6). He stayed quietly where He was, apparently careless about the suffering of the sisters, the death of His loved friend. The messenger sent by the sisters returned without Him, and reported His words (v. 4). *What a mockery they seemed when Lazarus already dead!* Remembering former miracles of a like kind (Luke vii. 15; viii. 55), they probably watched and prayed for His appearance day after day, until all hope was gone. Body must be buried, dangerous to keep it long. In hot

countries very speedy decay. Still no message from their loved Master. Was He afraid for Himself (v. 8)? Did that make Him heedless of the suffering of those He loved? We would have expected at least some expression of sympathy, but there is *nothing*. He Himself tells us why He delayed (v. 4). His work was so comprehensive and so far-reaching that only He Himself could understand the reason of His action. How are His marvellous wisdom and goodness magnified in the light He deigns to throw upon the reason of His apparently vexatious delay! He wants not only to comfort Martha and Mary, **but to establish their faith in Him.** This He did by the working *of a greater miracle* than they had ever dreamt of. It enkindled true faith in the hearts of many unbelievers (v. 45), while it has been of unspeakable comfort to Christians of every place and age. **This is how Christ answers true prayer,—by giving to us, not just what we want, but something of infinitely more value.** When He delays its answer it is for our greatest good. When He continues to us our pain, and sends sorrow upon sorrow, it is just because the sore discipline is needed (Rom. viii. 28). When true prayer is not answered, we may be sure it is for a wise end.

> 'Though dark my path and sad my lot,
> Let me be still and murmur not;
> But breathe the prayer divinely taught,
> "Thy will be done."'

II. **Martha's Belief in Christ** (vv. 20-32).—Christ's time had now come; all was prepared for the great miracle; He set out for Bethany. How characteristic of both is the reception He gets from the sisters! Martha leaves the sympathising relatives (v. 19) and rushes out to meet Christ, but Mary sits in the house. Martha gives ready utterance (v. 21) to the thought that had been oppressing them; Mary speaks only once (v. 32). They still believed in Christ's power, only regretting bitterly that it had not been exercised on their behalf. But a thought strikes Martha. Would it be possible to exercise it still (v. 22)? Not that she expected the miracle, but she believed that He could if He would. She had been earnestly praying for a great blessing,—the saving of her brother's life; now she was to be taught an eternal truth, which was to bring to her and countless others abiding peace. See how He leads her up to the understanding (vv. 23-27) of it. Temporal life a great boon, but eternal life of infinitely greater value. He could and did give to her brother an extension of temporal life, but He can also give to all who believe in Him eternal life, with its infinite possibilities. Earthly intercourse pleasant, but must ever be marred and imperfect; heavenly intercourse, eternal union with Him, its blessedness none can realise (1 Cor. ii. 9). Martha may not have understood, but she believed (v. 27).

III. **Christ's Sympathy with the Sisters** (vv. 33-35).—If the sisters ever doubted of Christ's sympathy for them in their sore trouble, they must now be ashamed of themselves. The house was filled with weeping friends; the sisters in deep sorrow; '*He groaned in His spirit*,' literally, '*was moved with indignation*.' 'It was the indignation which the Lord of life felt at all that sin had wrought.' How much misery sin has brought into the world, and death! It is the cause of all our suffering (Rom. v. 12),

and yet we cling to it. He seeks to hide His sorrow, but it will not hide. **No doubt of His human brotherhood.** He was so moved by the sight of the tears of those He loved, that He wept in sympathy (v. 35). To enter into and share the feelings of others is true sympathy (Rom. xii. 15). Although He knew that their time of joy was at hand, He also knew that genuine sympathy is a true bond of union, and that by such true expressions of sympathy we win our way to the hearts of others. **Is it not this same living sympathy with us which ever enables Him to influence us for our good** (Heb. ii. 17; iv. 15)? No doubt now of His deep love for them. His sympathy was very sweet, but He came not to weep with them merely. His greatest work was yet to be done.

IV. **The Miracle** (vv. 36-44).—How memorable every detail of that wonderful scene! The exclamation of the Jews (v. 36) as they looked upon the Christ sorrowing for His friend, the demand of Christ to be taken to the grave. He goes there, followed by a large crowd. They gather in front of the cave; their wonder increases as Jesus gives the order; then the interference of Martha (v. 39), and the reminding her of the confession of her faith so lately made (v. 40). And then He is heard speaking, praying to God the Father to manifest His Sonship in the presence of these unbelievers. Then the piercing command addressed to the dead, '*Lazarus, come forth,*' which Lazarus must have heard, for he immediately appeared,—no sign of decay and death about him, though he had lain so long in the tomb. How they must all have been amazed! It was not only a marvellous proof of His Godhead, but also a startling illustration of the truth of His words to Martha (v. 35). **But if Christ had full power over life and death, could not He dower with eternal life, as well as with a few short years?** The thought was ecstasy! Death's power for ever gone; all the misery it brings in its train for ever banished. *Here is the full meaning of Christ's work; this the wonderful message the Messiah has for the sons of men—to fit men for this eternal life the work He came to earth to do* (John iii. 15, 16; vi. 40). All can have this precious boon by believing in Christ Jesus (v. 26). **How can we show this belief?** By being good and true and pure, as He was; by seeking to imitate Him in every action of our lives. Nor is this eternal life some shadowy possession which we are to enter upon in a future state, for it is the having Christ's spirit in us, and we must have that now, **if at all** (1 John v. 12; John x. 28).

V. **The Conduct of the Jews** (vv. 45, 46).—Many believed, others did not. Some were anxious to live the higher life, others quite contented with a life of worldliness. *Is not that what is happening every day among ourselves?*

LESSONS

1. The dead can hear the voice of the Son of God, and all at the last day shall hear Him.

2. Jesus speaks now to the dead in sin, and they may hear Him now, if they do not close their ears and hearts. Believing in Him, we have in us already the life that never dies.

IX.—CLEANSING OF THE TEN LEPERS

Luke xvii. 12-19

Sketch of Lesson.—You all know what the word 'gratitude' means. When any one has been kind, spoken encouraging, helpful words, shown you how to get over a difficulty, or made you a nice present, you are thankful to him—look upon him as your friend. You feel that he wants to help you and do you good, and you believe in him and love him. *Ingratitude is the opposite of all this.* Would you not be ashamed to receive a very valuable gift from any one and not thank him for it? Would you not despise any one who showed such a thankless, selfish spirit? I am sure you would. Our lesson to-day tells us of a very valuable gift that Christ gladly gave to ten men, who were in the extremity of distress—a gift which only Christ could give—and how only one of the ten thanked Him for it, and that one an enemy of Him and His friends, brought up to hate and abhor and receive no benefit from a Jew. From it we hope you will learn the beauty of gratitude, the hatefulness of ingratitude.

I. **The Prayer of the Lepers** (vv. 12, 13).—In this Christian country there are many infirmaries and hospitals for the treatment of all kinds of diseases, so that no one, however poor he may be, or however infectious his disease, may be neglected. *We have to thank Christ's teaching for this.* Very different among the Jews even in our Lord's time. The lepers were banished from their homes, and not allowed to approach within one hundred paces of any one. Leprosy a peculiarly dreaded disease among the Jews (*read* Lev. xiii. *and* xiv., *which tell the law concerning its treatment; also* Exod. iv. 6; Num. xii. 10; 2 Kings v. 1-27). It was called the 'finger of God,' 'the stroke'; was thought to be incurable, took a variety of forms, some of them very repulsive. The leper carried about him the emblems of death: his garments were rent, his head was uncovered, his lips covered, he had to cry out 'Unclean, unclean.' *Because it was so loathsome and so incurable it was selected as the special type of sin; the leper the type of one dead in sin; its defilement and corruption of the healthy body the type of the destruction and defilement of the soul by sin.* These ten lepers, Jews and Samaritans together, religious differences and personal hatred forgotten in their common misery, stood afar off, as the law commanded, perhaps at their usual station, to ask alms of the passers-by; but hearing of the power and the great compassion of Christ, loudly demand to be healed. '*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*' They would not acknowledge His Messiahship, but they believed Him to be a prophet, gifted above other men, able to heal them. They thus had faith—the necessary qualification before being healed—although very imperfect, and therefore they were healed.

II. **The ever-ready Compassion of Jesus** (v. 14).—Now as ever, Jesus listens to the cry of the distressed. Personal danger even does not deter Him from helping the miserable. He makes no distinction between Jews and Samaritans—all suffer, all need, and all must be helped. Leprosy—the type of that worse disease of sin He came to

cleanse—always appealed specially to Him (Luke v. 13). **Without hesitation He answered their prayer,** but it must be in accordance with the law, '*Go show yourselves unto the priests*' (v. 14; Lev. xiii.) Here was the test of their faith. Would they trust Him and obey? He did not definitely promise that they would be cured, but there was an implied promise in His words. They stood the test, believed His word, **at once obeyed,** Jews and Samaritans each going to his own priest. Their reward came quickly. '*As they went, they were cleansed.*' *The very moment they obeyed they were cleansed.* Just the same with the leprosy of sin; penitence assures pardon. **When we really desire God's forgiveness and are prepared to receive it, that moment we are forgiven. When our sins are not forgiven, it is not because God will not forgive, but because we are not prepared to be forgiven.** [Illustrate by children being sorry or not sorry for having disobeyed parents or teachers.]

III. **The Gratitude of the Samaritan** (vv. 15, 16).—The whole ten had *faith* enough to be cleansed, only one had the *love* which compelled him to give expression to his gratitude. They were all full of joy at the great benefit received, only one thought of the goodness of the Benefactor, and the warm thanks due to Him. Enough for the nine that the priests declared them clean, and they were permitted to return back to the joys of family life. *This Samaritan's joy was deeper and of the right kind*, for the moment he discovered that he was healed '*he with a loud voice glorified God.*' He recognised God as the source of all goodness (Jas. i. 17), and therefore his first duty was to Him (compare Ps. li. 4). But his duty to God did not diminish his obligation to the Healer. '*He fell down on His face at His feet, giving Him thanks.*' Here was true gratitude! This Samaritan, who hated the very name of a Jew, overcame his very strongest feelings in thus humbly and thankfully accepting from a Jew this wondrous gift of healing. How deep was his faith! How real his love! How bold in doing what he knew to be right! **Everything that we have is God's gift!** God must be thanked first and every day of our lives for His numberless gifts. *Surely no one forgets morning and evening prayer to God*—

'Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll proclaim.'

IV. **The Ingratitude of the Nine** (vv. 17, 18).—How sadly Christ asks the question! He had often experienced ingratitude: His favours had been freely enjoyed, and the Benefactor forgotten. Perhaps a special cause for sorrow here. In the thanklessness of the nine He saw the slow progress of His earthly work. Whether they believed Him to be the Messiah or not, He knew that when a human benefactor could be treated so carelessly, especially the benefactor of such a gift, there could be no love for God in the heart. These men had gone, as they were asked to do, to the priests; perhaps the hatred of the priests to Christ caused them to threaten the men, as they did the man born blind. If so, how sadly the conduct of the lepers contrasts with his! *How despicable their selfishness and ingratitude made them!* Their bodies had been cleansed of leprosy; but their thanklessness betrayed the plague-spot of a moral leprosy more subtle and more dangerous. Note how Christ does not complain of their ingrati-

tude to Himself. He grieves that they have not given glory to God. *Only the stranger was grateful*—the only one, being a Samaritan, who had any excuse for ingratitude. His own friends accepted His benefits and thanklessly and shamefully neglected their Benefactor; while it was left to the Samaritan, as before to the Syrophœnician woman, to gratefully acknowledge Him as a Benefactor. [*Point to be enforced is that heedlessness of our duty to others, or doing positive harm to others, is,* **first of all,** *sin against God.*]

V. **The End of true Gratitude** (v. 19).—Salvation of soul added to health of body. This Samaritan stranger was a true child of God. The faith of the nine stopped short at the reception of a bodily cure; they desired, and therefore they got nothing more. This man had a true appreciation of his needs—was quick to see that this willing Healer was a true servant of God. To God, therefore, was the glory due, and to the servant of God humble, grateful thanks. What a revelation to him were Christ's words (v. 19)! His halting faith leapt into perfect trust. He was healed also of the leprosy of sin, because he desired to be free from its pollution.

LESSONS

1. **True gratitude is a giving of glory to God.** The Samaritan *first* gave glory to God and *then* gave thanks to his Healer. To God *everything* belongs. For all we receive we must thank Him first, and our friends and benefactors afterwards.

2. **Ingratitude is sin against God first, and then against our benefactors, because they are God's servants.** The ungrateful person is the prayerless person. If we never give thanks to God, there is no wonder that we live hard, selfish lives.

X.—PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE AND THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW

Luke xviii. 1-8

Introduction.—Have you ever wondered why you are taught to say your prayers morning and evening? You have been told that you must do it, that it is necessary to do it, that God wishes you to do it. All that true. No good boy or girl will ever neglect morning and evening prayer. But why? Our lesson to-day tells us, **Prayer is just asking from God what we want and what we need, and what He knows to be good for us.** You do not ask from your parents or from each other what you do not care to have. *Particularly*, you do not ask from them *again and again* or *implore* them to give you what you do not want. You would think that very foolish, would you not? And therefore you are not to say your prayers as if it did not matter how you said them, or because you would have felt a little uneasy if you had not said them, or because your parents expect or compel you to say them, or because you expect to get something from God for being so good; but just because you want to ask from God what you wish very much to get. [*Illustrate more fully by blind man begging on the street. He does not ask money from the passers-by for his own amusement, but because he wishes very much to get it.*] Our lesson to-day tells us that we must ask from God only what we need and desire very much to have.

I. **The poor Widow as Suppliant** (v. 3).—A widow in all countries the type of poverty and helplessness. In the East particularly a widow was very defenceless and often oppressed. Hence under the Mosaic law she was specially cared for (Exod. xxii. 22; Deut. x. 18; xxvii. 19; Isa. i. 17-23). And in the early Christian Church special provision was made for widows (Acts vi. 1; ix. 41; 1 Tim. v. 2). Little chance that such a poor helpless woman should make a successful appeal to this careless and unjust judge. He rudely refuses. But she soon went back again, still making the same appeal, '*Do me justice.*' '*Free me from my oppressors.*' Again he still more rudely refuses. Even that does not hinder her going back. **She was so impressed with the justice of her claim, she wanted justice so much, that she was determined never to cease asking it until she got it.** '*She kept coming to him.*' Her attitude to this judge is Christ's illustration of the urgency and intensity with which all prayer should be offered to God. No matter there is no answer for a time. No matter that God seems heedless of our request. If we believe that we are asking what is right, what it is good for us to receive, we must '*keep going to a throne of grace,*'—be urgent and faint not. **As the widow's poverty and helplessness were her best protection against the wrath of this unjust judge, so are our misery and helplessness the strongest reasons why God should hear and answer us.**

II. **The Character of the Judge** (v. 2).—Utterly unfit for his

position (Deut. xvi. 18). So abandoned that he cared nothing for appearances,—openly confessed his awful unworthiness (v. 4). We have no such judges in our country. In the East even yet judges are corrupt, take bribes, and dispense anything but justice. This judge does not believe in God, and therefore he recognises no duty to his fellow-men. Jehoshaphat describes a just judge (2 Chron. xix. 6-9; compare Deut. i. 16, 17; xvi. 18, 19). Remember Samuel's claim (1 Sam. xii. 3). How different was this man's boast! How hopeless to approach such a man expecting justice!

III. **The Judge's Decision** (vv. 4, 5).—It was a just decision, but given for the very worst of all reasons. His act of justice was the grossest act of injustice, as he did it, not because it was right, but because he could not be further troubled. *The widow's pertinacity gained the just decision*, not the judge's effort to do his duty. As the Syrophœnician woman cried after Jesus (Lesson XXXV., Part First), so did she cry for justice. Jacob too prevailed with God by an exercise of the same spirit (Gen. xxxii. 26).

IV. **Christ encourages all to pray** (vv. 6-8).—He does so by contrasting the character of God with that of this judge,—by holding up the conduct of this widow as a sure guide to all. Our need is much greater than hers, for we have to contend with spiritual enemies (Eph. vi. 12). On the other hand, we have every encouragement to approach a throne of grace. Our Judge is a righteous judge (Deut. xxxii. 4). He pleads with us to go to Him, to confess and to receive blessings (Ps. l. 15; 1 Pet. v. 7). There is therefore every reason '*to pray and not to faint.*' He would rather answer us quickly, *but it is good for us to wait*, as it was for Martha and Mary (Lesson VIII.) Note (v. 7) that the long-suffering of God is shown not only to His servants, but also to His enemies, for **perhaps they too may repent. There is a day of grace for all.** 'Yet a little while' (Heb. x. 37). But when the time does come He will strike swiftly (Isa. lxiii. 4; Ps. ix. 17). Even at its best how faint and feeble the faith of man is (v. 8)! He knew that '*the love of many shall wax cold.*'

V. **The Duty of Prayer.**—How often is prayer neglected? Very trifling reason often suffices to excuse the neglect of prayer. Something is far wrong when daily prayer is neglected. Just as we are unhappy when our parents are angry with us, so ought we to be when our Heavenly Father has cause to be offended. David often prayed (Ps. cxix. 164). *So do all good people.* They wish to do God's will,—to do what is right. And knowing that they cannot do it of themselves—as Christ has here advised—they often ask God to keep them right and help them to do right. But just because they are not able to do all that they wish *at once*, they do not stop asking for more help. They continue asking, and continue trying, until they get what they want. They are not weary in well-doing (Gal. vi. 9). They use their privilege of prayer, and continue using it, *until they are fitted to receive what they want.* It is not easy to be good,—to overcome all evil desire; but we must never cease to try; we must pray urgently, ask for the same thing again and again, neither faint from cowardice or faint-heartedness (2 Cor. iv. 1, 16; Eph. vi. 18).

LESSON

If this bad man, this unjust judge, yielded to the prayer of the widow only on account of her repeated and continued supplication, how much more will our Heavenly Father—who has commanded prayer to Him, who is more ready to hear than we are to ask, and who has shown us by His Son how to pray and what to pray for—hear and answer our requests!

XI.—PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke xviii. 9-14

Introduction.—Our lesson to-day tells us of the spirit in which we ought to approach God in prayer. A petitioner does not demand, he *humbly requests* the granting of the prayer of his petition. [*Illustrate by schoolboys asking a skating holiday from their teacher, and the like.*] Our lesson contrasts the spirit of the false and the true petitioner. How repulsive the one! How attractive the other!

I. **Those to whom the Parable was addressed** (v. 9).—We must not confine the application of this parable to the Pharisees. Self-righteousness was, no doubt, one of their chief characteristics (xvi. 15), but it was by no means confined to them. Christ warned His own disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matt. xvi. 6). He addressed a very large audience,—the self-righteous, *a large class in every age.* Note that this sin was a common Jewish one long before our Saviour's time. The Jews always trusted too much to the rigid performance of all the details of the Levitical law, which engendered pride and self-righteousness (compare Prov. xxx. 12; Isa. lxv. 5). This belief in themselves made them despise others, and treat them contemptuously. The Rabbis looked upon the common people as accursed because they did not know the law (John vii. 49); called each other by absurd names, such as, '*The light of Israel*,' '*The glory of the Law*,' to denote their own perfection; really believed that all mankind *except themselves* were cast out. It was no wonder that Christ so constantly warned against this sin; St. Paul too (Rom. xiv. 3, 10). *Even now many Christians, upon as slight grounds as the Pharisees, believe themselves very much better than others, of whom they know very little.* This despising of others is a very grievous sin, and one that causes much unhappiness. [Try to make the children understand that all are equal in God's sight, and that what makes one really better than another is the remembrance and the performance of duty to Him and others.]

II. **The two Petitioners** (v. 10).—They were alike only in one thing—they went to pray; utterly unlike in every other respect. To a Jew the very names Pharisee and Publican would account for the very marked difference in their appearance. The first belonged to an honoured and respected class—those who paid great attention to the concerns of religion; the other to a hated and despised class—the tax-gatherers, the servants of their oppressors—often very cruel oppressors themselves. The one frequented the most prominent places, even for his devotions (Matt. vi. 5); the other did not willingly attract public attention. The one wore the distinguishing dress of his class—the boxes holding the phylacteries = strips of parchment with texts on them—very prominent on the forehead and left elbow (compare Exod. xiii. 16; Deut. vi. 8; Matt. xxiii. 5), while the long flowing robe gave him a distinguished appearance (Num. xv. 38; Mark xii. 38). All make way for him, humbly do him reverence as he passes into the temple to pray, in accordance with his saintly character. The other does everything not to attract attention; with bowed head slips into the

temple, and in some quiet corner, with downcast eyes and all the marks of inward grief, he too prays.

III. **The Pharisee's Prayer** (vv. 11, 12).—The Jews prayed standing (1 Kings viii. 22). This man stood in a prominent place that all men might see him (Matt. vi. 5). His prayer is only a shameful, sinful boast. He compares himself with other men. *What has he to do with other men?* He is there to confess his own sins, but his prayer is merely a declaration of his own wonderful goodness. He never thinks of God at all, although he seems to address Him,—only of his admiring fellow-men. He thinks not of his own sinfulness, but of his own goodness. He thanks God for what he is not, mentions gross sins which he has not committed, takes care to avoid everything of which he has been guilty. *His religion is a cold, formal, heartless observance of needless forms.* He cares not for purity of soul, for the human gentleness and tenderness which would have gained for him love. Perhaps his self-righteousness was increased by his having escaped the grosser sins of which his class were guilty. *They were extortioners* (Matt. xxiii. 25). *They were unkind to the poor* (Mark xii. 40). His pride in his own goodness must also be gratified by his insulting his fellow-worshipper (v. 11). He now tells God how good he is (v. 12). He has done so much more than he need have done. The law commanded one fast in the year (Lev. xvi. 29); he fasted twice in the week. He gave the tenth, not only of his possessions, but of his gains (xi. 42); he even tithed the smallest product (Matt. xxiii. 23). This man dared to stand in the presence of God—so full of vanity, conceit, and all uncharitableness—only to tell Him of his own purity and goodness, of how much better he was than all others. **He has no sins to confess; so low has he fallen that he thinks himself perfect. So very great is his sinfulness that he thinks himself sinless.** He forgot that '*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper*' (Prov. xxviii. 13). *It is no merit of ours that others are as bad as we are; nor are we sinless because we may be better than others. To mention many gross sins that we have not committed, does not make the sins we have committed less heinous, and is certainly no reason for self-glorification. It is always dangerous to boast* (1 Cor. x. 12). *One must be absolutely sinless before one can claim righteousness in God's sight* (Jas. ii. 10). *How sunk in sin any man must be who could dare to do it!*

IV. **The Publican's Prayer** (v. 13).—There could not be a greater contrast. He too not as other men. He was so humbled, crushed down with a sense of his own sinfulness, that he thought no one *could* be as bad as he was—**always the first step to a better life.** Note his attitude; the word '*standing*' implies shrinking away from notice. He does not think himself worthy to associate with other men; he keeps his eyes fixed on the ground. The Jew prayed looking upwards; he smites on his breast, the expression of very deep sorrow (xxii. 48; Nahum ii. 7). Revised Version margin, '*God be merciful to me the sinner*' (compare 1 Tim. i. 15). These are the two feelings which filled his soul. (*a*) His own great sinfulness; (*b*) God's great mercy. *The Pharisee wanted nothing,—went only to boast. The Publican wanted mercy, and asked it in a way which showed that his happiness was bound up in the granting it.* **That was true prayer.**

V. **The Application of the Parable** (v. 14).—The Pharisee returns worse than he went,—more self-righteous, and therefore in a more hopeless state than before. The Publican was justified = completely pardoned. The Pharisee wanted nothing, and got nothing. The Publican had found out the true meaning of prayer, and his prayer was richly answered. **Self-righteousness God abhors and will utterly destroy. The sinner deeply conscious of sin, and humbly asking for pardon, He will accept and endow with blessing.**

LESSON

When we pray, let our own unworthiness and God's mercy fill our thoughts, and let us make humble confession of sin with an earnest cry for pardon.

XII.—JESUS BLESSES LITTLE CHILDREN

Matt. xix. 13-15; Mark x. 13-16; Luke xviii. 15-17

Introduction.—The subject of our lesson to-day has been a favourite one with poet and painter, with grown-up people and young. Jesus encouraging, holding intercourse with, and blessing the little children, appears in His most attractive character, for His greatness and glory are never more manifest than when He humbles Himself to the lowly and helpless. Our glorious High Priest, who made atonement for a world, could yet delight in blessing and pressing fondly to His bosom the helpless infants.

Sketch of Lesson.—A kingdom is a country over which a king reigns. When the king is wise and good he is much loved and faithfully served (*as our own Queen is*), because he thinks not of his own pleasure, but of the welfare of his subjects. We hear a great deal in the gospels about the kingdom of heaven or of God. The prophets foretold that a Messiah or Deliverer was to come, who was to establish a kingdom upon the earth. The Jews did not rightly understand the meaning of this prophecy. They expected Him to set up a kingdom in Jerusalem, from which He was to send forth an army to conquer the world, and that they all were to have great power under His rule (Matt. xx. 21). Because all these expectations were grievously disappointed, they would not accept Christ as the Messiah. Christ often told them about His kingdom, its nature, its government, and its subjects. John the Baptist's message was, '*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*' Christ's whole teaching centred round the necessity of preparation for becoming subjects of that kingdom, with many declarations of the blessedness of those who became its subjects. The poor in spirit were declared to be heirs of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. v. 3). Only those who were converted and became as little children could enter into it (Matt. xviii. 3). A man must be born again before he can enter into the kingdom of God (John iii. 3). A declaration of a like nature is made in our lesson of to-day, and we must try to understand it.

I. **Children brought to Christ for Blessing.**—Even in the hardest life there are times of joy and gladness. Good men fighting for the right have always had times of rest and encouragement. [Instance Elijah (1 Kings xix. 18), John Knox, Luther.] *Such times absolutely necessary.* Christ's life very hard, very persecuted, very forsaken. Not only was intercourse with His Heavenly Father essential, His human heart longed for the love, confidence, respect of His fellow-men. *The story of His earthly life is largely one of disbelief in His teaching, personal hatred, and persecution.* Now and then we have glimpses of a better state of things—as at the home in Bethany, as in the declared belief in Himself and of confidence in Him, as in the case of those about whom we are to speak to-day. These people (Matt. xix. 1) had listened to His teaching, had evidently been deeply impressed with His mighty power, **always exercised for good** (Matt. xix. 2). Large numbers of them had followed Him and listened to His wise words (Luke xiv. 25). He had sought to help the poor and the sinful (Lesson VI.) And, therefore, not only was their interest in Him

awakened, but they began to trust Him. *They manifested their trust in a very decided way.* Nothing is so dear to a mother as her little helpless child. She never wearies in ministering to its comfort, and would sacrifice almost everything to secure its happiness. Jewish mothers were in the habit of taking their little babes to the chief Rabbis—the holy men—to receive their blessing. They believed that such a blessing was a protection against harm. *These mothers had such confidence in Jesus, such belief in His goodness,* **because He had been so good to the poor and helpless,** *that they were sure His blessing would be a safeguard against harm.* They, therefore, crowded to Him, holding up to Him their helpless babes, that He might bless them. What a beautiful sight! *The Good Shepherd holding the helpless lambs in His arms* (Isa. xl. 11). Would you not like to say to Him—

'Fain I would to Thee be brought,—
Blessed Lord, forbid it not;
In the kingdom of Thy grace
Give a little child a place'?

II. **Christ's Displeasure at the Disciples.**—Why was He so displeased? Because the disciples tried to prevent those anxious mothers from taking their children to Christ to be blessed. Some of these children must have been very young, for the word used by St. Luke means infants or sucklings. What was their reason for trying to keep them away? That Christ might not be troubled with their importunity. Not the first time they had interfered in the same way and been rebuked (Lesson XXXV., Part First). No doubt they meant it for good; they incurred Christ's stern displeasure in ignorance. They had been deeply interested in His discourse upon a very important subject (Matt. xix. 3-12; Mark x. 2-12). That discourse must not be interrupted; *the older people needed to be taught, and could understand.* Why trouble Him with these infants who could understand nothing, and had need only of their mothers' care? '*Jesus rebuked them.*' He wished them to understand that none are too young to be brought to Him—that infancy is the proper time for all to be brought. Christ, in effect, tells them that far from the older people only being fitted to approach Him, they are quite unfit, unless they come with the spirit of these children. It is because Christ has thus taught that all our little children are presented very young to be blessed by Him. You yourselves were baptized when very young. You have all seen infants baptized. Over them the minister repeats words of blessing, and craves for them Christ's blessing as he dedicates them to His service. *Do you yourselves care to receive an answer to that prayer?*

III. '**Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.**'—Christ's teaching often surprised His disciples. It was so utterly different from the teaching of their Rabbis and chief priests. *Here was another surprise.* Not only were the children not to be kept away from Him, *but they and such as they are the true subjects of the kingdom of heaven.* All who would enter there, be their acquirements what they may, be their worldly experience very great, **must seek entrance in the spirit of a little child.** They must have the same aptitude to learn, the same trustfulness, helplessness, and ignorance. A lesson this to the disciples, who must learn that if they were to be the

subjects of this kingdom, they must get rid of the pride, the belief in their own knowledge and experience, which prompted them to try to keep the children away. We also, who are Christ's servants, and desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven, can only do so by cultivating the same childlike spirit. A child feels how weak and ignorant it is, while it ought to be obedient, teachable, trustful. **Such as we ought to be in the presence of God** (Ps. cxxxi. 1, 2; 1 Pet. ii. 2). A child ought to be meek, humble, trustful, gentle, pure. *If not so, he has not the childlike spirit—the spirit which Jesus blesses.* **It is only such a spirit that can receive Christ's blessing, only such a spirit that can enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

'On earth they sought the Saviour's grace,
On earth they loved His name;
And now they see His blessed face,
And stand before the Lamb.'

IV. **Only those having the childlike Spirit can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven** (Mark x. 15; Luke xviii. 17).—The meaning of Christ's words is unmistakable. It is not difficult to understand, but very difficult to obey. We have all so much belief in ourselves, in our own wisdom, and cleverness, and ability to guide ourselves aright, that it is hard to give it all up, **to be made to feel that we are the very reverse of all that we had believed ourselves to be.** Still, when we come to our right mind, there is something very restful in the knowledge that God is watching over us and cares for us, *as the mother watches over and tends her helpless babe.* **Truly we have reached a high stage of goodness when we can trust God with the same loving, unconscious trust as a child trusts its parents.**

LESSONS

1. **Christ blesses you in infancy; let it be the great work of your lives to be worthy of that blessing.**

2. **As children, we can enter into the kingdom of God easier than afterwards.** Children have everything to learn, nothing to unlearn. It is easier to become good then than at any other period of our lives.

TO THE TEACHER

The teacher will find in this lesson a good opportunity of referring to the subject of baptism, and of setting before the children the privileges which are theirs in the baptismal covenant.

XIII.—JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG MAN

Matt. xix. 16-26; Mark x. 17-27; Luke xviii. 18-27

Introduction.—There is a very close connection between this and the preceding lesson. This young ruler must have seen and heard Christ blessing the little children, and believing Him to be a pure and holy man—one who, owing to the supreme goodness of His own character, could tell him by what great work he might win eternal life—impulsively ran up to Him and knelt before Him, as he put to Him the famous question, '**What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?**' (Mark. x. 17). There was something very attractive about him, and he was so evidently in earnest. If he had not the true spirit of self-surrender, at least he was no hypocrite. *He evidently believed that it was possible for him to* **win** *eternal life for himself.* **His difficulty was in knowing how it was to be done.** According to his own account, he had been working hard to win it, and yet he was not satisfied that he had done enough. *His conscience was uneasy*; he had no assurance of salvation, but he was willing to make an extraordinary effort to gain his wish. He was full of good intentions, but really knew very little of what he himself was capable. He tried to be and do good, while he deceived himself as to the pitiable, self-indulgent weakness of his nature. *We shall see how wisely Christ treated him, and yet how he failed.*

I. **The Young Man's Question** (v. 16).—What prompted it? He was evidently discontented—not happy. Why? He had a great many worldly advantages. He was rich, had much influence, was a ruler, was respected, evidently tried to do his duty, yet not happy. There was something wanting, which he had tried to get (v. 20), but as yet had failed. *Christ's goodness had awakened fresh hope in him.* This man who was so good would surely help him to the goodness he desired; at any rate he would ask Him. He forgot for the time that he was rich, powerful, a public official; that Christ was a despised Nazarene, poor, hated by the chief men; he saw only His goodness, and wished to know its secret; he did not take time to think—must embrace the present opportunity. *He ran to Him, kneeled before Him, and asked the all-important question* (v. 16). Christ's words and actions told him that there was something very valuable that, rich as he was, he had not got,—something that he felt his wealth could not give him. **He would buy it or work for it, but get it he must.** Seeing or hearing of good and noble deeds done, or kindness shown, *we wish we could do the same; we believe we could; we need only to be tried. It all seems so easy, and it is delightful to get the credit of good deeds. If only a like chance would come to us!* **Many chances come to everybody every day. While we are looking for big chances,** *the* **chances come and pass, and pass unheeded.**

II. **Christ's Answer to the Young Man's Question** (vv. 17-19).—The ruler had no right to call Christ '*good*,' because he did not believe Him to be divine. *No man is perfectly good*, and therefore no man deserves the title. Just possible that the word was used as a superior addressing an inferior,

'My good man,' 'My good child'; the ruler addressing the Nazarene. '*None good but one—God*' (1 John iii. 5) is the reminder of Jesus. The gentle rebuke administered, Christ, **as usual**, wishes to help this would-be disciple. *No great or almost impossible work needed*, only '*keep the commandments.*' That did not satisfy him; hoped to be told of other commandments than those he was familiar with. Again Christ answers his question by repeating two or three of the commandments forbidding the grosser sins. Christ wished to make him understand that these commandments were not fully kept by merely obeying them in the letter—that they meant far more than appeared on the surface—*that to keep them perfectly the heart must be pure in the sight of God.* This teaching same as He had taught before (Matt. v. 17). Note also that Christ takes the commandments of the Second Table only; He does not even speak of man's duty to God. No need to speak of that until his duty to his fellow-men is better performed (1 John iv. 20). **Keeping the letter of Christ's law is a very imperfect keeping of it.** [*Illustrate by the difference between willing and unwilling obedience; the one much more valuable than the other; the one* **right** *and the other* **wrong.**]

III. **The Young Man's Self-righteousness** (v. 20).—He was astonished at Christ's answer; his self-righteousness prevented him from understanding its meaning. 'You must think that I am a very gross sinner when you ask me to keep *these* commandments; I *have* kept them all.' He is so frank in his statements; evidently believes every word he says; looks upon himself as perfectly blameless. He is no hypocrite—there is no pretence—*but he is a self-deceiver.* His self-righteousness had blinded his spiritual eyesight; he calmly claims for himself perfection. He had done all that he knew was demanded of him, **only tell him what more he had to do, and he would do it.** Such is the self-confidence of youth, such youth's belief in its power and goodness! Hence the harshness of its judgments! *Why then is he dissatisfied with himself? why does the sight of Christ's goodness stir his conscience to tell him that he is not good?* Even although he cannot be blamed for his treatment of his fellow-men, **what about his duty to God?** Has that been fully performed? Does he love Him better than anything else? Would he obey Him at whatever cost? Would that love for the good—which he really had—prove so powerful that no other love could contend against it? *We shall see.*

IV. **Jesus tests his Love** (vv. 21, 22).—Jesus tests his love just as He tried the faith of others. Abraham stood the test (Gen. xxii.; Lessons XXXV., XXXVIII., XL., Part First). Jesus pleased with his eagerness—his enthusiasm; *He would have saved him if He could*; He wanted him to know what he loved best, also that God must be loved best (Mark xii. 30). Did he love his money better than God? Not only was he asked to give up his riches, but his position, and become a follower of the despised Nazarene. **He loved his money; he only admired goodness. When one had to be sacrificed, it could not be the money.** What a miserable self-deceiver he was after all! He wanted to serve two masters—God and Mammon. The unpopularity, the hardship of life as a follower of Christ, appalled him. How different was St. Paul (Phil. iii. 6-9)! This young man wanted to be a Mr. Facing-both-ways. He knew that he was refusing

something very valuable—'*went away sorrowful*'—**but he could not do otherwise; his love of money was too strong for him.**

LESSONS

1. **We must give up whatever would come between us and the love of God.** The test often varies. This young man loved his money best; others love pleasure, or power, or dress, or any sinful indulgence best. Some children would rather be bad than good; they find the greatest pleasure in being cowardly, and cruel, and mean, and making others unhappy. **All these follies and sins must be given up.**

2. **Let each try to find out what is keeping him from loving Christ best, and having found it, give it up.** It is much easier to do that in childhood than at any other period of life.

XIV.—PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

Matt. xx. 1-16

Introduction.—The young ruler had left Christ because he was unable to give up his money. He cared for it far more than the goodness he professed to love so much, and therefore he could not be a disciple of Christ's. How different were the feelings which his departure occasioned in the mind of Christ, and in those of His disciples! On account of his many good qualities, Christ loved him, and therefore grieved over his sad failure, while He admitted the strength of the temptation to which he had yielded (Matt. xix. 23, 24). The disciples were contrasting their own conduct with his—all to their own advantage. They claimed to have acted so much more unselfishly. *Had they not given up all that they possessed for Christ's sake?* The impulsive Peter gives utterance to the self-righteous thought which filled their souls (v. 27). *Surely such action as theirs was worthy of a great reward.* No doubt it would be rewarded, and rewarded in a way far above their wildest expectations; but the mere fact of this question being asked showed that these disciples had not yet attained to the spirit of Christ Jesus. They were followers of Christ, not altogether because they believed in Him and His work, but because they hoped to receive substantial benefit. This was a very dangerous spirit to cultivate, and could not be possessed by a true subject of the kingdom of God. **They must work with Christ, not for reward, but from free love.** *Christ tells them this parable to convince them of their error and to warn them against it.*

Sketch of Lesson.—Christ always took His illustration from actions and incidents with which His hearers were perfectly familiar. The manner of hiring these labourers, the bargain made with them, the long trying toil under the hot sun, the payment at the end of the day's labour, the dissatisfaction of the first band, who, although they had been paid according to agreement, grudged the others the hire their master thought fit to give, his showing them the injustice of their dissatisfaction—all this they must have been familiar with, and it enforced the lesson which our Lord wished to teach them. That all the servants of Christ should be rewarded, is evident; but the point of the parable lies in v. 15. *We are not good judges as to what our reward ought to be, not concerned as to how Christ rewards the labour of others, as to whether they are to get more or less than ourselves.* **It is enough for us to know that Christ will accept us, and give us all that He hath promised, that we can be the recipients of infinite blessings, not because we deserve them, but because Christ wills that we should receive them. Salvation is not of works but of free grace.**

I. **The engaging of the Labourers** (vv. 1-7).—In our Lord's time there were many vineyards in Palestine; many people were employed in them. The mode of working them must have been quite familiar to the disciples. Some labourers were kept all the year; at special seasons extra hands were employed to overtake the necessary work. Perhaps the scene here pictured was vintage time, when ripe fruit had to be pulled and preserved, therefore

very important to get extra labourers and as many as possible. The householder goes very early in the morning to the market-place, and again at different times of the day, even at a very late hour (v. 6), corresponding to our five o'clock in the evening, engaging all he could get, and sending them straight away to the work that was so pressing. *All who put themselves in the way of getting work were at once employed.* [*Dock-labourers, porters, cabmen, in our own country stand at certain places waiting for employment; those most anxious for work are always there first, and stay on unweariedly until they are engaged.*] There is work for all in Christ's vineyard. No one who desires to work needs stand idle. **There is work for the youngest as for the oldest, for the weak as for the strong, for the poor as for the rich, and work well suited to make all better and happier.** When we are not working for Christ, He is ever saying to us, '*Why stand ye all the day idle?*' Can we, who have been taught at home and in the Sabbath School and in the Church, answer, 'Because no man hath hired us'? Christ's call to work comes to us in every invitation of the Gospel and in every opportunity to do good. Remember the hymn—

'Work, for the night is coming!
Work through the sunny noon,
Fill brightest hours with labour,
Rest comes sure and soon.'

II. **The hiring of the Labourers** (vv. 2, 4, 5).—With the first band a distinct bargain is made. They were to receive the usual wages for a day's labour, about sevenpence of our money. With the others hired at different hours no bargain is made; they were to receive what was just and right, a just proportion of the whole day's wages. They were quite contented to work on these terms—expected nothing more. Those last engaged, evidently glad to get something to do, will accept thankfully anything the master pleases to give them. Their necessities are great, but the householder also needs their work; very important that the ripe fruit should be secured in good order, and therefore an hour's work at that particular time very valuable. The alacrity with which these labourers went into the vineyard, without a distinct bargain, showed that they knew the word of the householder was to be trusted—that if they could only get the work, the wages would be all right. **In spiritual things the difficulty is never on Christ's side, but upon ours. If we are willing to do Christ's work, we may safely leave the wages to Him. Idleness is the great danger.**

III. **The paying of the Labourers** (vv. 8-10).—The day's work is at last done, the tiring labour under a hot sun. All are summoned to receive their wages, as the law commands (Lev. xix. 13; Deut. xxiv. 15). The last hired are called first. With good reason have they trusted to the generosity of their Master. They had not worked long, but they had worked well and cheerfully; and as it was important that the work should be done, the Master is generous. *They receive a full day's wages.* To the others, with whom he had made no bargain, he shows the same generosity—*all receive a full day's wages.* At last came the turn of those who had worked all the day, and with whom a distinct bargain was made. They get what was agreed upon, nothing more. The Master's generosity to the others had stirred their greed. As they had worked much longer

than the others, they expected to get far more—more than their bargain; and because they got only what they were entitled to, they were angry that the others, who had worked so much less time, had received the same wages. Although they could not complain that they had been unjustly treated, yet they felt slighted at their Master's seeming partiality. Of course they imagined that all the wrong was upon their Master's side, none upon theirs. *That spirit is not more common than it is bad and hurtful in the highest degree.*

IV. **The Master's Defence** (vv. 12-15).—This practically amounts to—You are interfering with what does not concern you. You have not been unjustly treated, and there your interest ends. What I am giving away is my own; I can give it to whom I like, and for what I like; I have dealt justly by you. The wrong is all on your side, not on mine. Your envy and jealousy have made you misunderstand my action. If you had been animated with a right spirit, you would have been glad at this exercise of my generosity, instead of meanly grudging to others what takes nothing out of your pocket. *Why should you exercise yourself about the affairs of others, or envy them?* Would it not be better for you to find your happiness in the doing of your own work, in cultivating a generous rather than an envious spirit? [*Make personal application by boys feeling unhappy and discontented, when others get what they have not got, or have better clothes than they have.*] **True happiness is not in these things, but in a cheerful, contented spirit.**

V. **Christ's Application of the Parable** (v. 16).—The parable arose out of St. Peter's question (xix. 27). In it the question is freely answered. The disciples were thinking more of the value of the reward than the spirit of the service. They had left all and followed Christ, *and they were believing themselves to be entitled to a very high place in His kingdom.* Christ here tells them that length of service is not everything—that it was a very dangerous spirit they were cultivating,—envy and jealousy of others, and might end in giving them the *lowest* instead of the *highest* place. What they have to do is to do their work as well as they can; and as they are working to the most generous of Masters, they may safely leave the reward to Him. *Is not that the trustful, believing spirit, in which all Christian service should be rendered?* '**Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him**' (1 Cor. ii. 9).

LESSONS

1. **Are we idle as far as the service of Christ is concerned, or are we working diligently in His vineyard?** That question well worth answering, and ought to be answered **now.**

2. **Our business is to think about the proper doing of the Lord's work, not to trouble ourselves about the reward. Christ is the most generous of Masters.**

XV.—JESUS EXPLAINS WHAT TRUE PROMOTION IS

Matt. xx. 20-28; Mark x. 35-45

Read Matt. xx. 20-28

Introduction.—Christ's earthly ministry was now fast drawing to a close. Twice before (Matt. xvi. 21; xvii. 22) had He explicitly told His disciples what kind of death He was to die. They had not seemed to pay very much heed to these declarations, probably regarding them as the outcome of the natural dread of one who had been so hated and persecuted. Their deep conviction that He was to end His earthly life as a king was very difficult to uproot, and rather than let it go, they preferred to regard Christ's warnings as the morbid fear of a wearied, disappointed man. Here He makes another effort to convince them. (Read Matt. xx. 17, 19; Mark x. 32-34.) He told them not only the fact of His impending death, but also the manner in which it was to be brought about—the falseness, the pain, the misery, the shame of it all. They were deeply impressed for the time with the manner in which He told them these painful facts, '*He had a baptism to be baptized with*' and (Luke xii. 50) '*They were amazed*'—'*They were afraid.*' The suffering was to be terrible, but it would be borne *His knowledge of its character, its certainty, did not lessen, it rather increased His suffering.* He went on bravely to face it all, determined to drink the last drop of that bitter cup. *Even yet the disciples were not fully convinced.* Our lesson to-day treats of an incident which betrays the strength of the worldly ambition of two of the disciples.

Sketch of Lesson.—All have power and influence. One of our greatest weaknesses is the desire to have authority—to be leaders. All very well when we are fitted to be so, and able to lead others for their good. But it is a bad spirit which regards power only as a means of gratifying personal ambition, which desires influence to gain some mean, personal end. It is quite a proper spirit to strive to excel; to be the most punctual, the best behaved, the best prepared scholar in the school; to be the favourite either at home or at school, because always willing to help; to gain the first place in fair competition. It is a wrong spirit which covets the first place, though it should not be deserved, which would not hesitate to adopt underhand means to gain the desired object. Wrong motives prompted James and John to get their mother to make the request to Christ, which our lesson to-day tells us of. *Although they had been living in such close intimacy with Jesus, they did not understand Him and His work* (Luke xviii. 34). He had just been telling them of His near crucifixion, and yet they are full of worldliness. They knew Him well enough to believe that if He promised them, they would be sure of great power and influence, and therefore they wished Him to grant them high places in His kingdom. We shall see how wisely He treated them.

I. **The Petition of James and John** (vv. 20, 21).—They do not venture to ask Christ themselves,—they get their mother to ask for them. Perhaps they remembered the rebuke which Jesus administered to them when dis-

puting among themselves as to who would be greatest (Matt. xviii. 1-3). They had evidently in mind the promise made (Matt. xix. 28), and wished to press their claim on Christ's attention. *Their selfish ambition made them pay little heed to the description of His coming crucifixion He had just given them*; His manner which had so '*amazed*' and '*frightened*' them is also forgotten. We may wonder that in such a presence, and after listening to such words, their own little affairs should entirely engage their attention. But they imagined that all this talk about persecution and death was only morbid dread; *they were sure that He would yet overcome it all.* They believed Him to be Messiah (Lesson XXXVI., Part First), and it was not possible that men could gain the victory over Him. His time had not yet come, but was coming fast. *Why talk of defeat, shame, death, when this the time for setting up a throne in Jerusalem?* They must ask for high honour *before the others*, in order that they may be first. Not difficult to understand why they reasoned thus, as they were so ignorant of the true meaning of the Messiah's mission; *but it is a proof of the commanding nature of human selfishness*, **which can exist and flourish in the presence of perfect unselfishness.**

II. **Did they know what they were asking** (v. 22)?—They did not. They craved places of high honour close to the person of Christ. They asked ignorantly,—did not know what the granting of such a request meant for them. They thought of Christ as reigning at Jerusalem; receiving the submission of the kings of the earth; of themselves as sharing in the honour of such a victorious reign. **That was all to come, but in a sense very different from theirs** (Phil. ii. 9-11). He was indeed a mighty Conqueror, but men were to be drawn to Him, to yield willingly to Him; His service was not to be slavery—the service of the conquered to the conqueror—but a service the outcome of adoring love. But before that the 'cup' and the 'baptism'—the spiritual bitterness and the outward persecution—**very suggestive symbols both.** He had *thus* to convince men of His devotion to their highest interests, by an unparalleled service and love and suffering for their sakes, **to win their love.** *These were the honours He wished to wear and the power He had to bestow.* Were they willing to share these? They were ignorantly asking for the places of the crucified thieves. How John must have regretted the vain ambition, which prompted him to make this request, when he looked upon the crucifixion scene! *Christ's honours can be obtained only in this way.* With the true servant of Christ the place of honour is the place of difficulty and hardest service. **True greatness, true honour, cannot be given. They must be won by hard, faithful, unselfish work.** The cross must always come before the crown (Luke xvi. 11; 2 Tim. ii. 12). [*Illustrate by soldier leading the forlorn hope; by captain the last on sinking vessel.*]

III. **Their petition granted** (v. 23).—But how different was the realisation from their expectation! James and John were true servants of Christ, and really loved His service, so that when they came to understand what the 'cup' and the 'baptism' meant, they did not shrink from drinking the one and being plunged in the other. James was the first Apostle to drink this cup of suffering and be baptized with this baptism of blood (Acts xii. 2). John died a natural death, but his long life was full of sore trouble and persecution for Christ's sake. They were indeed to occupy

high places in the kingdom of Christ, but the discipline which went before the honour was hard and bitter. *Christ knew what was before them, and therefore He rebuked them tenderly.* We often ask ignorantly (Rom. viii. 26). Much need have we to ask God to pardon our ignorance in asking. Easy to blame James and John for worldliness. Is not their prayer, their wish, often our own? We want to enjoy life to the full—enjoy selfishly—and yet be prepared for heaven. *But we cannot serve God and Mammon—cannot be both religious and worldly; must be self-denying to be Christlike—must be purified by hard discipline before we are fit for heavenly honour.* **Spiritual greatness is gained by humility, spiritual honour by unselfish service.**

'Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love Me more."'

IV. **Christ reproves and teaches the Ten** (vv. 24-28).—They were very angry with James and John, and yet they were animated by exactly the same spirit—not angry with them because they had done wrong, but jealous of them. Blamed James and John for what they wished to do themselves. As was His wont, how wisely and tenderly Jesus treats them! *His rebuke is contained in His exhibition of the spirit which animates the subjects of His kingdom.* That kingdom is animated by a spirit just the opposite of that which animates the kingdoms of the world. **The most faithful servants are the nobles of that kingdom. Not to reign but to render service; not to enjoy or possess at the expense of others, but to help others to enjoy, to give to others—that is true greatness.**

LESSONS

1. **True prayer is always answered, but often not in the way expected.**—We often ask amiss because we ask ignorantly, but God will always give to the true petitioner what is for his highest good.

2. **Greatness and honour in Christ's kingdom are the reward of loving, humble-minded, devoted service.**

3. **This service cannot be rendered without much self-denial and suffering.**—But Christ came not to be ministered to, but to minister. *Can we expect to share in His glory without sharing in His suffering?*

XVI.—SIGHT RESTORED TO BLIND BARTIMÆUS

Matt. xx. 29-34; Mark x. 46-52; Luke xviii. 35-43

Read Mark x. 46-52

Introduction.—In our last lesson we drew attention to Christ's own clear intimation of His fast-approaching death; to the slowness of His disciples to realise it; to their belief rather that He was on the eve of establishing a kingdom at Jerusalem. Taking into account their strong national prejudices and beliefs, there was some reason for this. Christ had admitted that He was the Messiah; the gathering crowd of His followers, as He proceeded on His way to Jerusalem, who openly received Him as such, had so deeply impressed them, that two of them had already asked Him for high places of honour in His kingdom, while among all the others the same feeling was equally strong. *All regarded this journey as a kind of coronation procession.* His mind was supposed to be taken up with the momentous affairs of His kingdom, and neither the afflicted nor the wretched—for whom He had done so much already—were to be permitted to approach Him (Mark x. 48). They wanted Him to do what they wished, and sought to prevent Him from hearing the cry of the distressed.

Sketch of Lesson.—*Recall the surroundings of Jesus when He performed this deed of healing.* (a) *His own disciples believed that He would soon be hailed as a king in Jerusalem, and were already intriguing for high appointments.* (b) *A crowd of admirers and believers in Him as the Messiah had gathered round Him, and were accompanying Him on His journey.* (c) *This crowd was increasing in numbers as He approached Jerusalem.* (d) *This self-constituted guard was trying to keep away from Him every sight and sound of misery.* (e) *His own mind was full of the awful fate that was so near.* All these things surround this miracle with special interest, and make it a wonderful display of our Saviour's compassion.

I. **The Cry of the Miserable.**—Blind, and a beggar by the wayside. These the outward circumstances of this claimant on the compassion of our Lord. [Blindness is a common affliction in the East. Travellers in Palestine and Egypt meet with many blind people.] At that time no asylums where the blind could be taught to read and learn to do many kinds of work, all which makes their lives so much more useful and happy. No need for blind beggars to go about our streets. Those who do so are not always deserving of charity. Then the *poor* blind had to beg or starve. This blind beggar, Bartimæus, was evidently well known by his stationing himself at the gate of Jericho. He had been told that all this stir was occasioned by the passing of the Messiah, and nothing daunted by the size of the crowd, or the efforts of many to silence him, he cried out loudly and persistently, '*Son of David, have mercy on me.*' He wished to be released from his unhappy lot; he believed that the Messiah could cure him, and therefore '*he cried the more a great deal.*' Note his belief that Christ was the Messiah. He addresses Him as 'Son of David' (compare Matt. xxii. 42 and John vii. 42); would perhaps know about the prophecies in Isa. xxxv. 5 and xlii. 7; had also, no doubt, heard that Christ had fulfilled these prophecies (John ix.), *and therefore if only the Messiah could hear him, his cure would be assured.*

II. **His Triumph over Difficulties.**—In any royal procession how difficult, almost impossible, it is for a poor petitioner to approach his sovereign. Not only would he and his misery be out of place there, but the guards would *at once* push him aside. This large festal throng which now surrounded Christ would not allow him to approach—thrust him aside, and sternly rebuked him for daring to make such a request at such a time. The Messiah, the King, could not now be troubled with the complaint of a blind beggar. They tried to silence him as a troublesome intruder, just as the disciples had tried to drive away the children (Lesson XII.) They could not have objected to him calling Christ '*Son of David*,' as two blind men had done before (Matt. ix. 27). They themselves were soon to give Him the same title (Matt. xxi. 9). *Here Christ publicly accepts the title of the Messiah, and it would ill become the Messiah, the Saviour, to refuse to hear the cry of the distressed.* **Nor does He.** When we want to be and to do good, it is wonderful how many difficulties come in the way, and from very unexpected quarters. Our calculations of help and sympathy are very often wrong, and we get disappointed. **In all such cases here is an example for us.** The more they tried to stop him, '*he cried the more a great deal.*'

'Some will hate thee, some will love thee,
Some will flatter, some will slight;
Cease from man, and look above thee,
Trust in God, and do the right.'

III. **Nothing can deafen Christ's Ear to the Cry of the Wretched.**—The homage of the crowd, their loudly-expressed belief, the great events that were impending, could not dull His ear to the cry of this blind beggar; as before He rebuked the disciples (Lesson XII.), so now He rebukes his officious friends. *They were intent on securing worldly greatness, He on the fulfilment of His mission.* '*He stood still, and commanded him to be called*' (v. 49). How changed now is the attitude of the crowd to this poor man! Just as courtiers always pay homage to the king's favourite, for their own selfish purposes, so do they now address to this man words of encouragement. They cared nothing for him or his trouble, **but the Messiah had taken notice of him.** '*Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee.*' St. Mark, in his usual graphic way, tells of the man's joyful readiness to obey. He sprang to his feet, threw off his outer garment, and came quickly into the presence of Christ. *This man felt his need, believed that the Messiah could give him what he so much wanted, and therefore* **responded to His invitation at once and joyfully.** In his haste he threw away his outer robe, *almost his only possession*, and full of the one great desire, went as he was into the presence of Christ.

There are many invitations in both Old and New Testament *to all* to go to Christ—**to take nothing with us except the great longing to receive pardon and salvation.** *Very many do not go because they neither feel the need nor desire the gift, or because they cannot leave their worldly goods or sins behind them* (Lesson XIII.) [Enforce this in simple words.]

'Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve!
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!

IV. **The Blind Man cured.**—Jesus knew what this man so much desired, and yet He asked him, '*What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*' Hence the need of prayer. Not enough that Christ should know our needs, we must also know what we need—desire to obtain; because we value it at its true worth. *Again is true faith rewarded.* As in other cases, this man's faith was tested before his prayer was answered. *Not My power, but* '*thy faith hath made thee whole.*' No answer to any but believing prayer, no pardon of sin unless we believe that we need and that God can give. It matters not what our earthly position may be. It is enough that we are needy and conscious of our needs. **Even in the midst of this flattering throng, Christ heard and answered the cry of this blind beggar.**

V. **His Faith a living Faith.**—The nine lepers had faith enough to be cured; they gave no glory to God, no thanks to their Benefactor. This man, St. Luke tells us, '*immediately followed Christ, glorifying God.*' He had true gratitude, true faith, gave glory to God, followed Christ. Christ's true followers are an ever-increasing number of those redeemed from sin and death. '*All the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*'

LESSONS

1. **Opportunities of approaching Christ should not be neglected.**—If Bartimæus had not appealed to Christ as He passed, he would have sat there a blind beggar all his life. Embrace and enjoy every religious privilege—prayer, reading the Scriptures, Church ordinances, Sunday Schools.

2. **When Christ calls, obey at once, and joyfully.** He is ever calling (Rev. iii. 20).

TO THE TEACHER

The three passages above noted—all of which ought to be carefully read—contain an account of the same miracle, although told in each case in slightly different ways. In Matthew we have recorded the cure of *two* blind men; St. Mark tells us that *one* was cured as Jesus *left* Jericho. St. Luke's version is, that *one* was cured as He *entered*, '*as He was come nigh unto*' Jericho. A great many suggestions have been made to reconcile those discrepancies. They are, however, not very important in themselves, and are probably nothing more than independent narratives of the same event.

XVII.—JESUS AND ZACCHÆUS

Luke xix. 1-10

Introduction.—In order better to understand the position of Zacchæus it is worth noticing that Jericho, in our Lord's time, was a rich and important city. It was situated about fifteen miles from Jerusalem and six from the Jordan, in a fertile district of country; had been called 'the city of palm-trees' (Judges i. 16). By its abundant supply of water (2 Kings ii. 21), a very valuable possession in Palestine, and by its palm-trees it was greatly enriched. The chief tax-gatherer in such an important place, which at that time had large balsam gardens and exported a large quantity of balsam, would be well known and of large influence. *He had great power and influence, was very rich*, **and yet he was not happy.** There was still a void in his heart. The fame of Jesus must have reached him, although he had not yet seen Him. His deeds of healing, His unheard-of teaching, His invariable goodness to the destitute, the afflicted, and the sinner—very probably he had witnessed the cure of Bartimæus—all stirred in him a yearning to see and hear this wonderful Healer. This man, though little of stature, who was dreaded perhaps on account of his power to extort money, was so eager to see Christ that he ran on in front of the great procession and climbed up into a tree which grew by the roadside. No doubt he made himself a subject of remark by his conduct, but he did not care. He wanted to see Jesus, and it heightens our idea of the compassion of the Saviour that even thus, when surrounded by a great multitude, He had the case of Zacchæus in His eye.

I. **Zacchæus was very much in earnest** (vv. 1-4).—How does he manifest this spirit? By the means he took to gain his end. Ordinary difficulties did not frighten him, nor did he hesitate to make himself a subject of remark if only he might gratify the strong yearning which possessed him. Ordinarily it was very easy to approach Jesus. But this clamouring crowd, believing that He was the long-promised Messiah, whose reign was about to begin, were trying to keep away from Him every disturbing element. The tax-gatherer, the servant of their conquerors, the hated of the people, the extortioner, would have little opportunity of getting near. Zacchæus did not dare to hope that Christ would take any notice of him. His work, his reputation, *everything* was against such a hope. Still he might see Him. He had no petition to offer, no request to make—the inward stirrings of his soul were too indefinite for that—yet he was determined to look upon that wonderful man, whose sayings and doings had moved him so strangely. He had tried again and again to catch a sight of Him, but the crowd prevented. Then vv. 3, 4. *For whatever reason, it is good to try to see Jesus. Many who have tried to find out all about Him from mere curiosity have been led to give themselves to Him entirely.*

II. **Jesus self-invited** (v. 5).—How amazed Zacchæus must have been! This prophet, this wonderful teacher knew him, spoke to him as a friend, and invited Himself to be his guest. He did not expect to be noticed at all, far less treated thus kindly; probably dreaded that the notice of the

crowd would draw Christ's attention to him, and that Christ, knowing he was a tax-gatherer, would rebuke him publicly for his extortion. *That is not Christ's way.* He not only preached that unselfishness, which so roused the anger of the Pharisees, but He acted what He preached. He not only told the parables of '*The Lost Sheep*' and '*The Lost Piece of Money*,' but to the very letter *did* what their teaching enjoined. **He was continually in search of the lost, those whom society had cast out.** In this city crowded with priests—for Jericho was a famous residence since the days of Elijah and Elisha—He invited Himself to be the guest of a publican. Surrounded with regal pomp He did not neglect the cry of the blind beggar. **So did He ever during His ministry** (compare Mark x. 14; Luke xiii. 11). **So is He ever acting still.** As with Bartimæus it was the need of Zacchæus which compelled him to brave everything to get into the presence of Christ, and also like him he got so much more than he had ever dared to hope for. *No one is too small, too mean, too unimportant, too unhappy to be overlooked by Him. Rather is it their great need which compels His constant, loving attention.*

III. **The Murmuring of Christ's Followers** (v. 7).—These were not the disciples but the Jews who had heard Christ's words to Zacchæus. Why need they have murmured at this time and after they had accepted Him as the promised Messiah? *He had ever acted in the same way* (Matt. ix. 11; Luke v. 30). He had descended from the dignity which they were thrusting upon Him to heal the blind beggar. They could not get over their intense dislike to the publicans, regarding them as the very lowest and basest; and that their Messiah should have invited Himself to the house of one of them, although the chief and very rich, was great cause of offence. *They hated the universal brotherhood which Christ preached and acted, but —His marvellous power and growing influence—they would do much to get these directed against their enemies.* And as they believed that He was about to make war upon them, they, as yet, confined themselves to murmuring. They had misread Old Testament prophecy, misunderstood Christ's message and work, hated and did their best to thwart Him, and soon for them would come a terrible awakening.

IV. **The noble Confession of Zacchæus** (vv. 6, 8).—How his heart leapt within him as he heard the words of Christ! He knew *at once* the meaning of Christ's invitation. It meant far more than a small tax on his hospitality. Christ's going to his house, staying with him, treating him as a friend, was a much more powerful rebuke than the harshest words of blame would have been. **Kindness is a much more powerful instrument of rebuke than harshness.** If he had been an extortioner the bad treatment he received was largely the cause. [**Persistently call a boy bad, treat him as bad, and he is likely to think it no matter though he is bad.**] Christ's loving treatment appealed to the noble side of his nature, and under His kindly strengthening influence the true man stood revealed. **He stood forth, in the face of the crowd, and made his great confession to his Lord.** Whatever they called him he would be no more an extortioner. He would (*a*) give the half of everything he had to the poor, and (*b*) restore fourfold what he had wrongfully exacted—much more than the law demanded (Lev. vi. 5; Num. v. 6, 7). With all his riches he had

been really poor; now that he knows what true riches are, he hastens to make himself worthy of their possession. *And thus it is ever with those whom Christ is teaching the value of goodness.* **They hasten to act, to cast aside everything that would prevent their possessing it.** [*Explain in very simple words that goodness is the most valuable of all our possessions, and the necessity of all possessing it.*]

V. **Jesus readily accepts his offered Service** (vv. 9, 10).—Jesus knew that he was deeply in earnest, that he was taking upon himself no rash vows, that he deeply repented, and that his future life would be an effort after the new obedience. Hence Christ graciously accepts him. **This day is salvation come to this house.** He was already a son of Abraham according to the flesh, now he was to be a spiritual son (Rom. iv. 11, 12, 16; Gal. iii. 7). **'For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'**

LESSONS

1. **The desire to see Jesus is generally the beginning of a new life.** Good impulses should ever be encouraged and acted upon.

2. **Christ is much more willing to receive us than we are to meet Him.** It is sin that keeps us from Him.

3. **The repentant sinner always seeks to make restitution.** Action must ever be joined to profession.

XVIII.—MARY ANOINTS THE FEET OF JESUS

Matt. xxvi. 6-13; Mark xiv. 3-9; John xii. 1-8

Revision of last Lesson.—In our last lesson we saw that Jesus went away with Zacchæus to abide at his house. Who was Zacchæus? What position did he hold among the publicans? Why was he so anxious to get a sight of Jesus? He had heard of Christ's miracles and teaching and specially of His love for **publicans** and **sinners**. What did he do in order to get a proper view of Jesus? Why did he require to climb up into a tree? His earnestness enabled him to overcome all difficulties. Nothing will keep the anxious soul back from the Saviour. What did Jesus do when He came to the place where Zacchæus was? Was Zacchæus glad when Jesus spoke to him? What did he do? Were the people pleased when Jesus selected the house of Zacchæus for His abode? Why did they murmur? Why did they think that Jesus should not make **friends** with **sinners**? Because they did not know that 'the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'

Sketch of Lesson.—Jesus journeyed from Jericho to Bethany. Jesus remained one night only at Jericho. Next morning He set out for Jerusalem. Why was He going there? The feast of the Passover was at hand. Explain what this feast was. It commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. People came to it from all parts of the country and from foreign lands. How did they generally travel to it? In bands or companies, both for companionship and for safety. Picture the formation of such a band—young and old, from neighbouring villages and towns, all journeying along, to appear before the Lord at Jerusalem (Deut. xvi. 16). In one of these pilgrim bands Jesus travelled from Jericho. What kind of road had they to pass along? Steep, through wild country, infested with robbers (Luke x. 30). Journey long—about six hours. Jesus would be wearied at the end of it. What are our feelings at the end of a long and tiresome journey? Glad to get rest—to be received by friends—to be welcomed by those who have been waiting and longing for our coming. Such would be the feelings of Jesus when He came from Jericho to Bethany, where He had true disciples and loving friends. Our lesson tells us of the chief of these friends, and of **the entertainment they made for Him.**

I. **The Home at Bethany.**—We have had glimpses of it before (Luke x. 38-42; John xi.) Who of them are specially mentioned as taking part in showing their love and gratitude to Jesus on this occasion?

Simon (Matt. xxvi. 6; Mark xiv. 3). Who was Simon? He is called the leper; he must have been cured of his leprosy—most probably by Jesus. What part did he take in the entertainment? He gave his house; well might he give the use of his house to entertain Jesus, for if He had not cured him, he would have been driven from home to live with lepers. Through the mercy of Christ shown to him he can now live among his friends, and he willingly does honour to Jesus.

Who else is mentioned? '**Lazarus** was one of them that sat at the table with Him.' What had happened to Lazarus before this? He took ill when

Jesus was absent. Sisters sent for Jesus, but Lazarus died before He came. Jesus raised him from the grave after he had been dead four days. At the supper he honoured Jesus by eating and drinking—showing that he was alive again, and was a living proof of the Saviour's power to raise the dead.

Who else was there? '**Martha** served.' Does Martha now fret and grumble because she has to serve (Luke x. 40)? No. Her heart was now in her service. She can now honour the Saviour by working for Him. She does not now wish her work to be noticed, and she is not envious now because her sister does not show her love to Jesus in the same way as herself.

Who is it among those present that receives special mention? It is **Mary**. How does she attract attention? Is it by still sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to the words of Life? No. Her way of showing honour and love to Jesus is now changed. Once she wished to take from Him all she could get (Luke x. 39). Now she wished to give Him all she had. Her heart was full of gratitude to Him for calling back from the grave her only brother, and for the peace and joy which filled her soul.

II. **The Feet of Jesus anointed by Mary.**—She was constrained to do something which would show the greatness and the intensity of her love. Words could not express what she felt. She did to Him what is done to kings only, and not often to them. She anointed His head and then His feet with 'very precious' ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair (John xii. 3; Matt. xxvi. 7; Mark xiv. 3). Comparing the foregoing, we notice that Matthew and Mark relate that 'a woman' anointed the Saviour's **head**. John relates that the woman was Mary, and that she anointed His **feet**. There must have been some reason, unknown to us, for Matthew and Mark not mentioning Mary by name. John mentions the anointing of the **feet only**, because it was so unusual to anoint the **feet** with 'very precious' ointment. 'To anoint the feet, even of the greatest monarch, was long unknown.' Let us see, then, in this act the depth of Mary's devotion, the intensity of her love, and the thorough consecration of herself and all she had to her Lord and Saviour. Women gloried in their hair,—Mary used hers in honouring Christ.

III. **Disapproval of Mary's Action by Judas and other Disciples.**—The disciples were present at the supper given to Jesus. Should they not be greatly pleased? Yes. Jesus was their Friend and Master, and they ought to have rejoiced when He was honoured. The act of Mary will surely meet with their approval? She anointed His head and His feet. Surely they will confess that she has done a good work on Him? Let us see (read John xii. 4-6; Matt. xxvi. 8, 9; Mark xiv. 4, 5). Judas found fault. The 'disciples' and 'some there' were displeased and angry, and said, 'Why this waste of the ointment made?' Judas was the first to make complaint, and the others joined with him in expressing their disapproval. See what evil one bad man may do. One bad boy, by his words and example, may ruin his companions.

Why were Judas and other disciples displeased? Ointment wasted; it might have been sold for three hundred pence (about £10). What would they have done with the money? Used it for themselves? No. Given it to the poor. Perhaps some of the disciples were sincere in their fault-finding. Want of love and faith hindered them from seeing any real good in Mary's

act of devotion, and they really loved the poor. But it was not so with Judas (John xii. 6). How sinful it was for them to find fault with any one for showing too much love for Jesus!

IV. **Jesus defends Mary and commends her for her Action.**—Did the words spoken by Judas and the others pass unnoticed? No. Jesus heard them and was displeased. How did He show His displeasure at their remarks? He commanded them to 'let her alone,' and asked, 'Why trouble ye the woman?' He reproved their fault-finding, and said to them they would have many opportunities of helping the poor, but few for showing honour to Himself. Did He stop with reproving the fault-finders? No. He commended Mary and her action. She could not have done anything more fitting than anointing Him. She did it too in the right spirit and at the right time (John xii. 7; Matt. xxvi. 10-12; Mark xiv. 6-8). The greatness of her love prompted the action, and His presence at the supper gave her the opportunity of doing it. If Mary had neglected this opportunity for showing her love to Christ publicly, would she have had another? No. Jesus says that the meaning of her action was to prepare His body for burial. Mary could not be present when Christ's body would be taken down from the Cross, but she had 'done what she could,' and had anointed His body 'aforehand' for His burial. What fact does Jesus convey to the disciples by putting this meaning on Mary's action? He is to be put to death soon, and Mary honours Him by anticipating the anointing His body. Judas and others, blinded by love of money, unbelief, could not understand Mary's action, had no sympathy with her in her self-sacrificing devotion, did not know the meaning which Jesus put upon the anointing of His body; so they spoke bitter things against it and Mary. Christ defended her, and foretold that her deed would be a memorial of her in all generations (Mark xiv. 9; Matt. xxvi. 13).

PRACTICAL LESSON

How can we show our love to Jesus? How can we serve Him best? By keeping His glory before us **in everything we do.** In our recreations, in doing well our daily work or task, we can serve our Lord and Saviour—especially **in giving up to Him our hearts** and all that we value most. **Keep no gift back from Christ** that may be useful to Him and His cause, though it may cost us much to part with it.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In this lesson even the youngest child in the Grade will understand the four outstanding points, but in the case of those just turned seven, teachers will do well not to attempt to teach all that is under the four heads. In dealing with a domestic incident such as is contained in this lesson, the teacher will sustain interest by 'picturing out' in suitable words 'the home at Bethany.'

XIX.—JESUS IN PROCESSION TO JERUSALEM

Mark xi. 1-11; Luke xix. 28-44; Matt. xxi. 15, 16

Read Luke xix. 28-44

Revision.—What was our last lesson about? Who are the persons specially mentioned in it? What did Mary do which brought her into special notice? She anointed the *feet* of Jesus—she was not satisfied with anointing His head only. This showed her great devotion to Jesus, and her desire to confer on Him the greatest honour. She anointed them with 'ointment of spikenard, very costly' (John xii. 3). This showed her self-denial. She made a great personal sacrifice in honouring her Lord and Saviour. She gave Him the most precious thing she had. What was the meaning of Mary's act? Judas and others thought it had no meaning. It was wasting precious ointment, they thought. Jesus said it had a deep meaning. He called it a 'good work,' and said, 'She is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying' (Mark xiv. 8). Mary may not have understood all that her act meant, but she performed it because by it she could show the greatness of her gratitude and love to Jesus.

Sketch of Lesson.—In our last lesson we saw Jesus receiving honours from friends in a private house. This lesson takes us from the private house to the public highway—from the small village of Bethany to the holy city Jerusalem. We are impressed with the difference of manner which appears in the conduct of Jesus now, as compared with the earlier days of His ministry. Then He avoided display and refused to accept public honours (Matt. xvi. 20; John vi. 15). On this occasion He not only accepted them, but gave orders regarding some of the arrangements. On the way to Jerusalem He came near a village called Bethphage ('the house of figs'), and He sent two of His disciples to it, in order to bring an ass and her colt, which He told them they would find tied at a certain place (Matt. xxi. 2; Mark xi. 2-6). They found everything as Jesus had said, and the owner of them was ready to give them to the service of the Lord; so they were brought to Jesus. The disciples selected the colt, 'whereon man never sat,' and they cast their garments on it, 'and they set Jesus thereon.' From this place the disciples and the multitude who had come from Jerusalem to meet Jesus (John xii. 12, 13) formed a great procession, and paying honours to Him, such as are given to kings only, they escorted Him to the city, shouting, 'Hosanna! blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.'

I. **What was the meaning of this Procession?**—When we look at the lowliness of the equipage, it is evident that Jesus did not mean to make a great earthly display. When kings and conquerors enter the chief city of the empire in triumph, they do so in great state. They ride upon horses, or are drawn in chariots, and are attended by the greatest nobles and statesmen. Everything that is fitted to make an impression and that can exalt the hero of the procession is attended to. How different it was when Jesus came to His own city! No horses, no chariots, no soldiers as attendants—He came 'sitting on an ass's colt.' There was nothing in this

procession to indicate that Jesus wished to get Himself proclaimed an earthly king, or that He desired to take advantage of the enthusiasm of the people, and make an attempt to set up a kingdom and government. He had before this withdrawn from the people when they tried 'by force to make Him a king.' He always discouraged the idea which had taken hold of the minds of the disciples that, through attachment to Him, they would receive any worldly glory. He had shortly before told them of all the events that were to befall Him at Jerusalem (Matt. xvi. 21). The night before, He had spoken of Mary's act of devotion, when she anointed Him, as having been done for His burial. He could not then mean by this procession to indicate any desire to yield to popular enthusiasm and be proclaimed as an earthly king.

Yet He received such honours as were paid to kings only. It was not uncommon in the East for princes and kings to ride upon asses and mules, and the people welcomed them by spreading their garments on the ground over which they would pass (Judges v. 10; 1 Kings i. 33; 2 Kings ix. 13). These things were done to Jesus as He rode in procession (Mark xi. 8). The disciples and people shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David' (Matt. xxi. 9). They were prepared to rally round Him if He raised the standard and claimed the sceptre and throne of David. But the circumstances of His procession, the lowliness of His retinue, and His whole manner when He came in view of the holy city must have convinced them that He came, not as an earthly king to make war and restore the glory of the nation, but as the Prince of Peace. He came in this character to indicate the nature of His kingdom and the nature of His rule (Zech. ix. 9). By thus coming He fulfilled all righteousness. He gave a proof that He was the Messiah, though not an earthly king, and showed that the glory of His character and kingdom consisted in humility. He offered Himself to them as a spiritual king who had come to proclaim 'on earth peace and goodwill toward men.' Our lesson goes on to tell us of

II. **The Reception Jesus met with when He came in this Character.**—He was not received when He came to His own city as an earthly king would have been. There were no great preparations made for His coming. [Illustrate how people prepare for royal visits.] The rulers and priests and those in authority did not meet Him at the gates and give Him the keys of the city as a token of their allegiance and loyalty; 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' Did all the people act like their rulers? No; a great crowd accompanied Him on the way to the city, and these gave Him an enthusiastic reception (vv. 37, 38). They rejoiced; they praised God; they rehearsed to each other the great works Jesus had done. They acknowledged Him as the Messiah, and calling Hosanna (which means, Save now, I beseech thee), they applied to Him the words of welcome, 'Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord' (refer to Ps. cxviii. 26). *Note specially that the children joined in giving Jesus a hearty reception* (read Matt. xxi. 15, 16). They recognised Him as the 'Son of David,' and joined in the shout of welcome which had been raised by the crowd. Their joy was so great it could not be restrained, for even in the temple they cried, 'Hosanna to the Son of David.' These were likely children who had come up to the feast as well as the children of Jerusalem.

Contrast the conduct of the multitude and the children with that of the Pharisees and priests. The Pharisees found fault with the disciples and people, and wanted Jesus to silence them. See the answer given (v. 40). What a reproof for *their coldness and hard-heartedness*! The priests were sore displeased at the children, 'and said unto Him, Hearest Thou what these say?' What a gracious answer Jesus gave! While reproving the priests for their ignorance and jealousy and contempt for the little ones, He showed that the praise of such was ordained by God, and was most acceptable to Him (Ps. viii. 2). Jesus had more joy in the praise of the children than in that of the multitude, who were influenced by false views of His kingdom, and the hope of earthly blessings from the Messiah. Our lesson still further shows us

III. **The Effect which the Procession and the Reception produced on Jesus.**—Surely when taking part in such a display He must have been filled with joy! The enthusiasm of the disciples, the acknowledgment of Him as the Messiah by the multitude, must have been pleasing to Him. But His joy was marred by the knowledge that many were now praising Him who were ignorant of the true meaning of this manifestation, and would in a few days reject Him and clamour for His death. Joy was turned into grief by the knowledge that the rulers and priests and the mass of the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not receive Him in His true character—as the Prince of Peace, who came to them with salvation. Amid all the surrounding rejoicings the Saviour wept (vv. 41-44). He wept, but not for Himself, though His sufferings were so near and would be so terrible. His tears fell for Jerusalem; for the grievous sin of the nation, which in rejecting Him was rejecting salvation and peace. How sad to think that men can, through wilful ignorance, make themselves so blind as not to know the time when salvation had come so near to them (the day of their visitation)! How great must the love of Jesus be to sinners, and how willing must He be to save them, when their rejection of Him when He comes to offer them peace and pardon grieves Him so much!

PRACTICAL LESSON

Are we acknowledging Jesus as our King? He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, and He demands from us loyal service; He wishes us to make His law the rule of our lives. *Are we doing all we can to advance the interests of His kingdom?* We always pray 'Thy kingdom come,' do we always act in such a way as to bring His kingdom nearer? *Do we avoid doing anything that will cause Him sorrow?* Are we attending to the things which belong to our peace, and do we know the day of our visitation? If we forget these things, we grieve our King and Saviour, and run the risk of awful loss and ruin.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Direct attention to the *humility* of Jesus when He came as a king. His character the Prince of Peace. Give special prominence to the reception given by the children. Warn against impressions made in times of excitement or in youthful days passing away. Impress upon the children the importance of knowing the day of their visitation, and the things which belong to their peace. Explain these terms in the simplest words.

XX.—PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Matt. xxi. 28-32

Revision.—What was the subject of last lesson? In this procession Jesus rode on an ass, and thus fulfilled the prophecy of Zech. ix. 9. By this act He indicated that His kingdom is not to be distinguished by earthly pomp. The Messiah is not to be a great warrior but the Prince of Peace. How did the people receive Jesus when He came to them as a king? The disciples, the crowds who came out to meet Him, and the children in Jerusalem received Him with signs of loyalty and joy. They showed this by spreading their garments in the way, by waving palm branches in the air, and by praising God for all the mighty works that they had seen; 'Saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.' The Pharisees were displeased when they saw the joy of the people, and asked Jesus to rebuke His disciples. What did Jesus do when He came within sight of the city? He 'wept over it.' This proves the great love that Jesus has for sinners. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had rejected the messages of peace and mercy which God had sent in the past,—they do not know Him who now comes to them as the Prince of Peace, and soon judgments will come upon them for all their sins. The thought of such a doom made Jesus weep.

Sketch of Lesson.—Our lesson is in the form of a parable. It begins with a question—'But what think ye?' This connects the parable with a conversation which had taken place between Jesus and the chief priests and the elders (see the verses preceding). Jesus had greatly displeased those in authority. He had entered the city and temple in the character of the Messiah. He had approved of the people and the children in the temple crying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David.' He had cleansed the temple of the unholy traffic which the chief priests and elders had sanctioned, and they asked Him, 'By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority?' (See the answer of Jesus, vv. 24-27.) In this answer Jesus shows that they ought to have known who He was and from whom He had His authority. John had told them about His coming, and if they had believed John, they should have received Him. But they pretended not to be able to tell whether John was a prophet from God or not—they could not say whether he revealed the will of God or not. Jesus at once detected their hypocrisy, and made them convict themselves of falsehood and disobedience by getting from them a reply to His question, 'But what think ye? A certain man had two sons.' We can have no difficulty in understanding this parable.

I. **Jesus interprets it, and gives it a special Application.**—He made the priests and elders convict themselves of hypocrisy and disobedience. They acknowledged that the son who at first refused to obey his father, but afterwards repented and went, honoured and obeyed his father; while the son who professed readiness to obey, but did not, dishonoured his father, and was guilty of falsehood, hypocrisy, and disobedience. Jesus then declared that the *first son* represented the *publicans and sinners*. They

made no profession of love to God, or willingness to serve Him. They openly neglected the outward forms of religion and lived in gross sin. But when John came preaching repentance, they turned from their sins and believed him.

Jesus also declared that the *second son* represented *the priests and elders and the unbelieving Pharisees.* They professed to be devoted to the service of God. They professed obedience to His will—were always ready to do His commands; but how did they act when God made His will known by John? They knew who John was—knew also his mission (John i. 19-27). He preached to them repentance and righteousness (Matt. iii. 7-12), yet they did not repent and believe. They saw publicans and harlots repenting at his preaching and entering the kingdom of God, yet they did not follow; they professed reverence and obedience to God, but like the second son, they would not work in the Father's vineyard.

II. **The Parable is meant to have a Wide and General Application.**—Though spoken first to reprove the chief priests and elders and Pharisees, it is intended to teach lessons to us all. Like another parable of two sons (Luke xv. 11-32), it is capable of universal application and brings before us

(*a*) *The relationship which exists between God and men, and the claims which He has upon our affection and service.*—God is presented not merely as the *Creator* of men; that relationship alone would give Him a claim on all we are and all we have. We are His—He made us. Nor is He merely represented as our *Preserver and Benefactor*; that relationship itself would entitle Him to our gratitude and service. What would we be were it not for His preserving care (Acts xvii. 28)? All earthly blessings as well as spiritual are His gifts (Jas. i. 17, 18; Ps. ciii. 4, 5). But He is represented as our *Father.* This is the closest and dearest relationship; we are 'the sons of God.' This implies that He has a right to all our affection, our gratitude, and our obedience. Because He is our Father we should love Him with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. The parable further shows us

(*b*) *The way in which God wishes us to acknowledge His claims.*—How did the father in the parable test the affection and obedience of his sons? He asked them to work in his vineyard. Probably he had servants who could have done the work, but he wished his sons also to work. Work is not a degradation; it is a duty and an honour, and none should be ashamed of it. All Jews, no matter how rich, had to learn a trade. It would save some from ruin and misery if the same views of work were held now.

This illustrates what God, our Father, expects of us. We are highly honoured in being God's children, specially honoured if we are 'called the sons of God,' through Jesus Christ (1 John iii. 1, 2; Rom. viii. 17). But we must work. We must set the will of God before us as the law of our lives, and must prove our love and affection to our Father by rendering obedience to all His calls. *When work?* Now, to-day. *Where work?* Wherever you are—at home, at school, at play; try to remember you are God's child, and make everything a part of your 'Father's business.' Our lesson further shows

(*c*) *The different ways in which we treat the claims and commands of*

God our Father.—In the parable, the one son gave a rude and disrespectful answer—a direct refusal; the other gave a ready assent—most respectful in his tone and ready to please. Yet the rude one remembered his father's love, and repented and went to the vineyard; the soft-speaking one thought he had pleased his father by his respectful manner, and did no more. He broke his word, deceived his father, and acted the part of a hypocrite.

This represents the way we receive the commands of God. Some so careless and taken up with pleasure that they deny His claims and refuse to acknowledge His authority in any way. But a time of awakening comes, the voice of God is heard as the voice of a loving Father, and acknowledging His claims they repent and turn to Him (Luke xv. 17-19; Eph. ii. 1-10).

Others again make a profession of religion. They believe in God. They are regular in attending to outward forms. They say their prayers, they go to Church, attend Sunday School, but they are selfish, untruthful, ungovernable. They forget that, 'Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven' (Matt. vii. 21).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

Do the will of our Father—work. (*a*) *A mere profession of love to God and a formal religion are not what God seeks from us.* We must do the will of our Father, and must show our love and reverence by our deeds. (Show how children can do this among each other—at home among brothers, sisters, and parents.) (*b*) *If we have been disobedient in the past, it is yet time to repent.* Our Father is willing to forgive the past, and accept now of our service. (*c*) *The work of God is to believe on Jesus Christ* (John vi. 28, 29).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

After explaining very shortly the application of the parable to the chief priests and elders, give special attention to the truth that *God is our Father, and as such has claims on our love and obedience.* Illustrate this by showing what parents do for their children, etc. Show how love shows itself by deeds, and teach them to work, because they love, and not for the sake of any reward.

XXI.—JESUS AND THE GREEK PROSELYTES

John xii. 20-33

Introduction.—The Passover was the greatest of all the Jewish national feasts. It commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exod. xii.), and was observed by Jews from all parts of Palestine, who came every year to Jerusalem to take part in this great religious service. Many who lived beyond Palestine, whose lot was cast among the Gentiles, came as often as they could to join in this sacred feast. Many too who were not Jews, who had been heathen and had renounced idolatry, and acknowledged the one living and true God, came from the Gentile nations—either to take part in the feast, or to show their faith by joining in the worship of God. These men were called proselytes, and were divided into two classes. Those who thoroughly renounced heathenism and sought admission to the Jewish Church by being circumcised, and becoming subject to the laws and rites of the Jews, were called 'proselytes of righteousness.' Those who were content with professing faith in the living and true God, and worshipping Him alone, without submitting to circumcision and conforming to all the Jewish ceremonies, were called 'proselytes of the gate.' They were allowed to come up to Jerusalem to worship, and were looked upon as pious Gentiles.

Sketch of Lesson.—Our lesson shows that some of these Greeks or Gentiles were present at Jerusalem when the events happened which have formed the subjects of previous lessons. They had seen the triumphal procession, and had heard the multitude acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. They had heard of the great miracles He had performed, and had learned something of His teaching and life. What they had seen and heard made them anxious to know more. How could their anxiety be satisfied? Jesus was engaged the whole day in the temple. They had no claims on His attention, as they were only Greeks. So many of His own countrymen were flocking after Him, it could not be expected He would have time to spend on a few strangers. They may have reasoned in this way, but men in *real earnest* can overcome every difficulty. So they went to Philip, one of the disciples, and they said to him, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.'

I. **What was the meaning of this request?**—Why did they wish to see Jesus? Were they moved by curiosity to get a sight of a great man of whom all the people in Jerusalem were talking? [Show how eager some people are to see kings, warriors, travellers.] Did they wish to see Him perform a miracle? No evidence that this was their motive. *Remember who they were, and this will help us to find out why they wished to see Jesus.* They were men who had given up heathenism. It could not satisfy their spiritual wants. They had professed faith in the true God, as revealed in the Old Testament. They had made great sacrifices to come to Jerusalem to worship; and wished to learn all that could be known about God and the way of life. So when they heard of Jesus, the great Teacher who was interesting the whole nation, they

naturally desired to have an interview with Him and know more of His doctrine. They *felt in themselves the wants of the heathen world.* It needed *light, life,* and a *revelation of love* which would make known to men that *God is their Father.* Jesus had said, 'I am the light of the world' (John viii. 12); 'I am the bread of life' (John vi. 35). He claimed to come from God, to have seen the Father, and to make known the Father. If these Greeks had heard even a rumour of these sayings they would think they had found **the one** who was to be **'a light to lighten the Gentiles'** (Luke ii. 32). They wished to see Jesus, to learn from Him the way of life, and the way to God the Father.

II. **The Means they used to get introduced to Jesus.**—As they were earnest and sincere in their desire to know more of the teaching of Jesus, they went to Philip, one of the disciples, and presented their request to him. Perhaps they knew him—perhaps Philip may have told them of the sayings and doings of Jesus. He had done this before to another whom he brought to Jesus (John i. 45). But Philip did not take on himself the responsibility of taking them into the presence of Jesus. He went and consulted Andrew, and they 'tell Jesus.'

III. **How did Jesus deal with the request?**—Did He grant it and allow them to meet Him? When the Jews as a nation were rejecting Him, did He see in the coming of these Gentiles a proof that the heathen were given Him for His heritage (Ps. ii. 8)? We would like to know, but John does not tell us. Can we form any opinion on this point? (Read vv. 23-26.) These words seem to be spoken to the Greeks as well as the disciples. How would the Greeks expect the Son of man to be glorified? Not by suffering and death. They would expect Him to be glorified by showing wisdom and power which would overcome all His enemies. **Beauty, wisdom, and strength formed their idea of glory.** How different this from the revelation given in Jesus! The hour has come when He must appear weak before the world and must die. **But in weakness and death He will be glorified.** This was a new thought to them—hard to understand; *but see how Jesus explains it.* **How is a corn of wheat glorified?** It contains in itself great possibilities; the fruit from one corn may increase till it could feed millions. But how? It must be cast into the ground—must die—before the life it contains can spring forth in greater abundance. So with the Son of man. He must die, else the life in Him remains His alone; but through His death, life in infinite fulness is given to men. The way to glory for men is the same as that which Jesus walked. Life and righteousness can only be gained by the death of self and sin. It was a difficult truth to both Jews and Greeks, but Jesus taught here what lies at the basis of all His teaching, that the sacrifice of self is the only way of obtaining life eternal. [It is difficult to explain this to children, but illustrations can be given of self-denial in small things, which will enable them to understand the chief point in this section.]

IV. **How was Jesus affected by this Incident?**—His soul was troubled. He naturally shrank from the suffering and death of which He had spoken. He betook Himself to His Father and prayed, 'Father,

save Me from this hour.' This does not mean a request to be delivered from the suffering, but was a prayer for strength to bear it and to come out of it a conqueror. He expressed the one overruling desire of His soul in the next petition, 'Father, glorify Thy name.' God answered the prayer of His Son. A voice from heaven said, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' This voice was heard by all present, but was understood in different ways by the people. It was meant to confirm the faith of the disciples, and was perhaps a sign to the Greeks. By it they had God bearing witness that Jesus was glorifying His name when He endured shame and humiliation and submitted to the death of the cross. [See other occasions when the voice of God bore testimony for Jesus. At Baptism (Matt. iii. 17); the Transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 5).] After the voice, the trouble which had overshadowed the soul of Jesus passed away. He looked forward to the coming struggle with the confidence of victory. He made plain to His disciples the death that awaited Him. He was to be lifted up; John says, that signified 'what death He should die.' It pointed to the cross. After that would be manifested the full glory of the Son of man. After being lifted up on the cross, He would rise again and ascend to the right hand of the Father. His true nature would then be known, the end and aim of His mission would be fully accomplished, and great results would afterwards follow. Instead of a few Greeks seeking Him, His attracting *power* will be so great, He will draw all men unto Him.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

(*a*) If we feel our *sinfulness* and *need* of a Saviour, we should not rest till we find Him.

(*b*) In order to *know Jesus as our Saviour*, we must use means to have communion with Him. The Church, the Sabbath School, and the Bible are meant to lead us to Jesus.

(*c*) When once we have found Him, we must *follow Him* and *serve Him*.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

This is a difficult lesson to teach young children. Try to interest them in the fact that the heathen sought Jesus while His own people rejected Him. Give special prominence to the practical lessons, and impress upon the children how ready Jesus is to receive all who come to Him.

XXII.—PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Matt. xxv. 1-13

Introduction.—The aim of this lesson is to teach the necessity of being always prepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples had put some questions to Jesus regarding this event. They wished to know when His coming would take place, and what signs would mark the time of His appearing (Matt. xxiv. 3). Jesus did not give a direct answer to their questions. He spoke, however, a number of parables, all meant to illustrate this subject (chaps. xxiv. and xxv.) These revealed that *Jesus, the Son of man, shall come again*; that *His coming* shall be *sudden* and *unexpected*; and that *some of His servants and disciples* will be found *faithless and slothful and unprepared at the time of His coming.* These truths are vividly presented in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **The 'ten Virgins went forth to meet the Bridegroom.'**—This was done in accordance with the marriage customs of the Jews. On the day of the marriage the bride waited, clothed in white robes, and adorned with ornaments, at her father's house. She was attended by not less than ten young female friends. In the course of the evening the bridegroom left his house to come to the house of the bride's father, to receive her and take her to his own home. On this journey he was accompanied by his friends, and when he came near the place where the bride was, her attendants went out to meet him, and joined his procession. As this took place at night, the whole company carried lighted torches or lamps, and with these burning brightly, they marched to the house of the bride's father, where the marriage ceremony was performed.

In this custom of virgins going out to meet the bridegroom, Jesus saw a fitting illustration of the kingdom of heaven—of the way in which the Church on earth should prepare for His coming again—and also of the way in which every one should prepare to meet Him.

The virgins were all friends of the bride, and all devoted to her service for that occasion. They were all interested in the bridegroom—all expected his coming—all made preparations for it—all provided lamps and lit them and went forth to the place appointed for them to meet him.

This is like the kingdom of heaven, or the Church on earth. Christ is *The Bridegroom.* This term is applied to Him to express the great love which He has for the Church (Ps. xlv.; Eph. v. 23-32). At present He is absent—He has gone to His Father's house, but He will come again to receive His bride and lead her to His heavenly home (Rev. xix. 7-9). As the ten virgins prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, so should the members of the Church prepare for the coming of the Lord. They have come out from the world and have dedicated themselves to Christ. They declare that they have faith in Jesus, and love to God in their hearts. They are now wearing as a wedding garment 'the righteousness which is of faith,' and they are waiting and 'looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus ii. 13). *All this applies* to *the individual as well as* to the *Church.* Every one who

believes in Jesus as a Saviour, and serves the true and living God, should 'wait for His Son from heaven.'

II. **The Bridegroom did not come so soon as the ten Virgins expected.**—He tarried. What happened then? 'They all slumbered and slept.' They got wearied with waiting; were worn out perhaps by the excitement, and so yielded the more easily to sleep. What fact connected with the kingdom of heaven does this represent? *Jesus did not appear so soon as the disciples and early Christians expected Him.* They thought His coming was at hand—might be in their lifetime, and were disappointed at the delay (1 Thess. iv. 13-17; 2 Thess. iii. 5). The thought that the coming of Jesus would happen soon was the means of quickening the spiritual life of the early Christians, and made them watch.

Jesus still tarries. Centuries have passed, and there is no sign of His coming. What has been the result on the Church and the Christian? Slumbering and sleeping! We do not think so often nor so seriously of the second coming as the early disciples did. How few are so interested in this event as to pray for it! Instead of watching, and waiting, and longing for Christ to come, most Christians now are indifferent, or allow the days of preparation to pass in idleness. Let every one guard against this danger. Listen to the cry, 'Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed' (Rom. xiii. 11-14).

III. **The Bridegroom came suddenly and unexpectedly.**—At midnight there was a cry made (v. 6). 'All . . . arose and trimmed their lamps.' Perhaps *all* the ten thought that they would yet be in time. But something went wrong. Five of them discovered that their lamps were going out, that they had no oil to replenish them with, and that they were too late to go out and buy any! What was to be done? Could they borrow from the others? No; the others were unwilling to lend, lest they might run short themselves. How foolish not to have thought of this; what a want of foresight not to have remembered that 'the coming' might be delayed! How imprudent to have been contented with a lamp burning in the beginning of the evening, and to have fallen asleep while the oil was being consumed! Still they did the best they could do, and went out to buy; but they were too late (v. 10). When they came back, 'the door was shut.' The five virgins who had oil in their vessels with their lamps went out to meet the bridegroom and went in with him to the feast. The other five who had gone to buy oil came back to find that they could not be admitted, for in reply to their request, 'Lord, lord, open to us,' the bridegroom said, 'I know you not.' The *prudence* of the first five entitles them to be called *wise*, and the *thoughtlessness* and *improvidence* of the other five mark them as *foolish*. What does this part of the parable teach? Jesus shall come suddenly and find many members of His Church sleeping. His coming will reveal the spiritual condition of all the members of the Church, and of all men. It will show who are earnest and sincere, and who are hypocrites—who have faith and love to God, and His Spirit dwelling in their hearts, and who have the form of godliness only. It will show who have continued faithful to the end (2 Pet. i. 5-12), and who have failed to 'give diligence to make their calling and election sure'—who have been wise unto salvation by seeking 'first the kingdom of God and His righteous-

ness,' and who have been foolish by having 'received the grace of God in vain.' Let us ask, to which class do we belong? Let every one remember that even before the second coming of Jesus, this separation between the wise and the foolish may take place; for at death the Lord comes to us, and if our hearts are not turned towards God and filled with His love, then we are not prepared to meet Him. Nothing will make us fit for this except faith in Jesus, love to God, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore watch and be ready.

PRACTICAL LESSON

The keynote of this lesson is, **Be ready**. In order to be always ready we must **watch**. Let the second coming of Jesus have a prominent place in our thoughts, and let it exercise its proper influence upon our actions. Let us shun doing anything of which we would be ashamed if He came and found us doing it.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It is difficult to teach this lesson to young children. Impress upon them that Jesus whom we love, and whom we cannot now see, has said that He shall come again to this world. He wants us to prepare for that coming by *loving Him*, *thinking of Him*, and *doing good* for *His sake*. Try to make them look on the coming of Jesus as an event to be *welcomed* and not something to be *dreaded*. Remind them that Jesus comes to us through death.

XXIII.—PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Matt. xxv. 14-30

Sketch of Lesson.—This lesson is the parable of the Talents. Like the parable of the Ten Virgins, it illustrates the kingdom of heaven, or the Church of Christ on earth, and shows us another way in which the members of the Church can prepare for the coming of their Lord. The man who went into a far country is the Lord Jesus Christ, who thus taught His disciples that He would soon leave them. The servants whom He called to Himself, and to whom He delivered His goods, represent (*a*) the Apostles and office-bearers of the Church; (*b*) all the members of the Church, all brought up in the Church, who are expected during the absence of their Lord to be engaged in the work of advancing His kingdom. The talents represent the various influences which we possess on account of our position and circumstances; the opportunities for doing good to others which we have, owing to the fact that time, money, learning are given to us; the powers of body and soul with which God has endowed us, and the capacities of mind and heart and spirit by which we can know and love and trust God who is our Creator and Father. The use and abuse of the talents, and the reward and punishment which follow, are meant to bring vividly before us the fact that we must be faithful in our different spheres, must devote ourselves with diligence to our Master's work, and must cultivate earnestly those religious faculties with which God has endowed us, as the time is coming when we must give an account. Then the faithful, earnest, and diligent servant shall receive the reward of his labour; but the wicked and slothful servant shall be cast into outer darkness. We have here—

I. **The Distribution of the Talents** (vv. 14, 15).—Notice the *principle* on which it was conducted. All got something, yet not alike; there was no uniformity, yet there was no injustice, for there was given 'to every man according to his several ability.' We can recognise the working of this principle throughout the universe, both in nature and among men. God has given to everything that lives and breathes some special function to perform, and that is in harmony with its nature. There is a great difference between the reed and the oak; the one is the symbol of weakness and frailty, the other of strength and endurance. Both have to endure the violence of wind and storm, and they are fitted for it; the one by bending before them, the other by defying them. Great difference here in the powers given to each, yet no injustice, as each has got what it can use.

In the social and religious history of men we see the same apparent inequality, yet no injustice. One is born an heir to wealth, another born in poverty; to one is given good constitution and physical strength, to another a frail body and feeble health; one is endowed with great mental faculties, and has the opportunity of cultivating them, another is slow at apprehension, and is brought up in ignorance. It seems strange that there should be this apparent inequality; yet there is no wrong done, for there is given 'to every man according to his several ability.' This same principle regulates the distribution of the special religious faculties with which God

has endowed us. We are not all alike. Some have a keener insight into truth (spiritual perception), a readier power of discerning the right (a good conscience), a stronger will in resisting temptation, and have the capacity of loving and trusting more than others. Though not equal in these respects, yet all have something. These are talents given by God according to the ability of the receiver.

II. **The Use made of the Talents received, and the Result** (vv. 16-18).—Two of the servants went and traded, and gained; one hid, and so finally lost his talent. The gain here is in proportion to the amount received at first, and the diligence and faithfulness with which that was used. By using well what they had, they gained more; by not using at all, the slothful servant lost what he had. [Illustrate this. Use and exercise strengthen and increase the powers of body and mind. Prevent a child from using its limbs, what happens? Loss of all power. Confine a man in total darkness, what happens? Blindness. On the other hand, allow healthy exercise, then growth, development. Arms and limbs grow by use and exercise, but become helpless and enfeebled if these are denied. The same is true of the mind; it must be educated, exercised, developed, and the result is proportioned to the training and original faculties. The same is true also of the spiritual nature of man. The will becomes enfeebled if it never resists temptation. So heart, conscience, spirit, become dead and dull if never turned towards God, who is the source of spiritual life, but grow and become strong if allowed to go out after Him.]

III. **The Reckoning Time, and the Accounts given by each Servant** (vv. 19, 20, 22, 24, 25).—They had to give an account of what they had received—nothing more. The same principle of reckoning will apply to us. 'To whom much is given, of him also shall much be required.' We do not expect a boy to do as much as a man; each has done well when he acts according to his ability. We do not expect the same amount of charity or deeds of kindness from the poor as from the rich; they have not the same opportunities of doing good or showing love, but each will be asked only to account for what he had power to do. The same is true regarding attainments and progress made in the spiritual life. Our natures, circumstances, opportunities for communion and growth in grace differ, but Jesus will reckon with us according to these.

Notice here the different manner and spirit in which the accounts are rendered. The first two came with joy, and said, 'Lord, thou deliveredst unto me,' etc.; the last came with ingratitude and insolence to confess his failure. See the excuses he urged. He did not say it was because he got little that he failed; but he blamed his master, 'hard man, reaping where he did not sow.' False views of his master produced fear and indolence, but his own words were used against him. The fear of strict justice should have urged him to a diligent and prudent use of the money committed to his charge.

This servant represents those who make the strictness of God's law an excuse for not doing anything. We see that only those who love their master work well, those who fear through false views of his character fail. How important it is for us to have right views of God as our Father!

IV. **The Awards given to each.**—*These are proportioned to work and capacity* (vv. 21, 23). The same words are spoken to both the diligent servants, and both receive such participation in the glory of their Lord as they are able to enjoy. In dealing with the evil and slothful servant we see a manifestation of a principle which runs through Christ's kingdom. 'To him that hath shall be given.' The use of a gift gains more; not to use or to abuse ends in the final loss of it. This law is operating in our lives every day—money spent uselessly, opportunities for doing good allowed to pass, time wasted, mental and spiritual powers neglected. These talents are now being taken from us, and if we do not take heed we may soon lose all that we have (Heb. ii. 1-3).

PRACTICAL LESSON

Jesus has given to every one at least one talent. He has given to every one, even the youngest child, the power of doing something for Him. Let us seek out the place and the opportunity for exercising this power—at home, at school, at work. Let us use all diligence, influenced by love to Him, to make such use of our talent as to receive the commendation, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

All the points in this lesson cannot be dealt with at one time. Point out specially what are the children's talents, viz. the power of loving, trusting, and obeying parents, opportunities for doing good to others. Show how they may love, trust, obey, and serve their Heavenly Father as they do their earthly, and so grow strong in the spirit.

XXIV.—JESUS FORETELLS THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

Matt. xxv. 31-46

Introduction.—The last two lessons represented the second coming of Jesus Christ under two different aspects. In the parable of the Ten Virgins He is represented as a bridegroom coming to receive the bride and to take her home to his own house. In the parable of the Talents He is represented as a master coming to receive an account from servants to whom he had entrusted the care of his goods during his absence in a far country. In both cases the truth set forth is that Jesus shall come again to the Church. This 'glorious appearing' will be a testing time for Christians; and only they who have *spiritual life*, and show that life by *watching* and *working*, will share in the glory which shall then be revealed.

Sketch of Lesson—I. **The Son of Man is to come as a King and a Judge.**—The name 'Son of man' reminds us of His first coming into the world. He came then as a little child; His coming was taken notice of by few (wise men, shepherds, Simeon). He occupied a humble position in life. He was attended during His ministry by a few peasants and fishermen, and at last was put to death on the cross. How different when He comes again! That same 'Son of man' 'shall come in His glory.' His attendants shall be 'all the holy angels,' 'then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.' He who received from men a scarlet robe, and a crown of thorns, and a reed for a sceptre, and was mocked as the 'King of the Jews,' shall then sit on the great white throne (Rev. xx. 11), clothed with majesty, crowned with glory, holding in His hand a sceptre of righteousness (Heb. i. 8).

'Earth can now but tell the story
Of Thy bitter cross and pain;
She shall yet behold Thy glory,
When Thou comest back to reign;
Christ is coming!
Let each heart repeat the strain.'

II. **The Son of Man is to be the Judge of all Men.**—He shall call to the judgment-seat both the living and the dead. 'Before Him shall be gathered all nations.' What a multitude! From the east and the west, the north and the south. All who have lived in the past, all living now, and all who will live till this day of judgment comes, shall be gathered together, and shall stand before the throne of His glory (Rev. xx. 12, 13). Though the multitude shall be so great, yet *every individual shall be tried as if he were the only one before the Judge.* The books of conscience and memory and God's book of remembrance shall be opened, and every man shall be judged according to his works.

In the act of judgment 'the Son of man' shall 'separate them one from another.' He shall divide them into *two* classes—the righteous and the wicked. He shall have no difficulty in doing this—as easily as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. The eye of the Judge can see the secret motives of all hearts, and can discern who have been His faithful servants and who have not.

The *grounds* on which this separation is to be made are *service to Christ and faith in Him.* More prominence is given to the service than to the faith, but the one is the fruit of the other. Jesus recognises service done to others, to His people, as done to Himself (vv. 35-40), and He looks on the refusal to do service to others as a refusal to serve Him (vv. 42-45). We cannot love God and our Saviour if we do not love our fellow-men, and by showing love to our fellow-men we give the best proof that we are the children of God, and have faith in Christ (1 John iii. 14; iv. 20; Jas. ii. 14-18).

III. **The Sentence pronounced by the Judge.**—The Son of man in giving sentence calls Himself 'the King.' He speaks first to the righteous—those who have given a proof of their having served Him by works of love, and whom He has set on His right hand. His words are gracious, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom' (v. 34). They had heard Him say 'Come' before that day, and because they came to Him when they were weary and heavy-laden sinners, He welcomes them now—'Ye blessed of My Father' (1 Pet. i. 3-5; Eph. i. 3-6). It is owing to the love of God the Father that sinners are redeemed, and to His grace that they are sanctified. In His wisdom He has made full preparation for giving those who love and serve His Son a kingdom—'an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for' them.

How different from these gracious words are those addressed to the wicked! 'Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' 'Depart'—they had never heard that word from the lips of Jesus before; they had been invited to come—conscience and the Holy Spirit had whispered it often, but they would not, so they are 'cursed.' Not cursed of God, but as they would not come to Christ for a blessing they must bear the curse of the law which they have broken. They receive the wages of sin—death. The punishment to which they are doomed was not meant for them—the fire to which they depart when they leave Christ's presence was not prepared for them. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they should turn to Him and live. Let us thank God that He sent His Son to be our Saviour before He sent Him to be our Judge; and that Jesus is now inviting us to come. Let us receive this gracious invitation and devote ourselves to His service here, so that when the great Judgment Day comes, He may welcome us as blessed of His Father.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. '*We must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.*'—No one can escape from this, so it is our duty to keep this fact always before us. Let us live like those who must give an account of all our thoughts and words and actions.

2. *The Son of man who is to be our Judge is now offered to us as our Saviour.*—If we accept Him as a *Saviour* and know Him as a *Friend,* we need not fear Him as a *Judge.*

3. *The best evidence we can give of faith in Christ is by performing*

works of love.—His whole life was one of self-sacrifice for others; and He wishes to see the same spirit in His people.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It will be easy for the teacher to make this a very practical and interesting lesson to the youngest children. Try to give them some idea of what is meant by *a judgment, a trial, a finding out whether we have done right or wrong.* Remember specially that the Judge is Jesus—once a child—who loves us and who died for us. When He comes again as a King and Judge, He shall then love little children as He did on earth. If children love the Saviour here, they need not fear Him on the judgment throne.

XXV.—JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES' FEET

John xiii. 1-17

Revision.—What was the subject of last lesson? Contrast the picture which it gave of the 'Son of man,' with 'Jesus washing the feet of His disciples'! Last lesson told us that the 'Son of man' shall come in His glory, attended by all the holy angels, and shall sit upon the throne of His glory. He whom the Jews had rejected, whom they were soon to condemn and crucify, foretold that at the end of the world He shall come as the *Judge* and *King* of all men. He shall sit upon the great white throne and shall judge the living and the dead, the small and the great, according to their works—shall separate them according to their characters and dispositions—shall receive the righteous to inherit a kingdom and life everlasting; but shall banish the wicked from His presence. What a contrast between the 'Son of man' depicted above, and the same 'Son of man' washing the feet of His disciples!

Sketch of Lesson.—We have here an account given of an incident which happened on the last day of the Saviour's life on earth. He knew that His hour had come, that He must leave the disciples and return to the Father. Before leaving them He desired to eat the paschal supper with them. In order to make arrangements for this He sent Peter and John into the city. By following His instructions they were brought into the presence of a man who had a guest-chamber, who willingly placed it at the service of Jesus. The chamber was a large upper room, furnished, and in it they made ready the Passover (Luke xxii. 7-16).

To this place Jesus and the disciples came in the evening. Then took place the incident which forms the subject of this lesson. One would imagine that, from what Jesus had said beforehand, and from all that had happened, the disciples must have thought that some terrible trial was soon to be endured by their Master. In these circumstances they will be solemn and humble, and anxious not to increase His troubles. Just the opposite! They began to quarrel about their respective positions (Luke xxii. 24-27). Probably they quarrelled about places of honour at the table, or about who should do the duty of a servant, and wash the feet of the others after their journey and before taking supper. It is humbling to think of such strife at such a time and before such a master. Surely He will administer a sharp reproof? No; He rose, laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel.

We see in this incident

I. An amazing Exhibition of the Love of Jesus for His Disciples.—Who could have blamed Him if all His thoughts had been at this hour engrossed with His own affairs?

(*a*) *Remember what was before Him*—all the trials He had to endure, the agony He had to pass through, and the death He had to die. He had all to do without receiving any human sympathy, so we could not have found fault with Him though His thoughts had been all centred on Himself.

(*b*) *Remember too who He is.* Soon He will seem helpless in the hands of His enemies; they will treat Him with scorn and contempt; He will appear so weak as not to be able to carry His cross, and will appear to be vanquished by death. Yet at the same time He knows 'that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and went to God.'

(*c*) *Remember too the ignorance and sinful stubbornness and the malicious hatred of some on whom He performed this service.* So ignorant about the nature of His mission and kingdom, that on the eve of His terrible darkness and humiliation they were quarrelling about who should be greatest. So stubborn was Peter that he refused to submit to the will of his Lord (vv. 6-10). Above all, remember that Judas was one of them —the traitor—whose heart the devil had filled with enmity to Jesus, and who was only waiting the opportunity to deliver Him up to His enemies. The thought of Jesus at such an hour, knowing His own majesty and power, voluntarily doing such menial service to such unworthy objects, fills us with amazement. Was there ever such love as this, such pity and such patient forbearance! 'Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.' *He loved them to the fullest extent that love could go.*

II. **By this Action Jesus gave an Exhibition of the Greatness of His Self-humiliation.**—He was ready and willing to humble Himself if He could by that promote the welfare of others. He taught the disciples by example what He had often taught in words—that true greatness can only be attained by those who are willing and ready to serve. They are disciples, He is the Master or Teacher; they are servants, He is the Lord. If *He* does not feel degraded by acting as a servant towards them in washing their feet, *they* should feel no degradation in doing the same for each other. To humble ourselves in order to be able to do a service of love to another is a far higher proof of nobility of soul and spirit than is given by allowing others to wait upon us as if they were our inferiors, and were honoured in serving us. [Show how children ought to show this spirit by the elder serving the younger, the strong helping the weak.]

In *the amazing exhibition of love and self-humiliation* which He gave on this occasion to those who are called '*His own*,' we see on a small scale *the greatness of the love which He bore for the whole human race.* He, 'being originally in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross' (Phil. ii. 6-8, rendered as it ought to read). Here is a manifestation of voluntary humiliation for the sake of sinful men, which proves that Jesus loved the whole human family to the completest and extremest degree.

III. **Jesus, through the resistance of Peter, was led to explain that this Action had a Spiritual Application** (read vv. 6-10).—Peter resisted the washing of his feet, but when he learned that this washing symbolised spiritual cleansing, and was meant to teach the disciples the need of having their daily walk and conversation made clean, then he wished to have feet, hands, and head washed. With great patience Jesus explained that when

a man is once bathed, or a sinner once regenerated and cleansed, he needs then to have only the sins and impurities of everyday life washed away in order to be wholly clean. We must seek not only to be *cleansed from sin's guilt, but also from sin's power.*

'Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.'

IV. Jesus taught that to attain to the Happiness of being Great through Service we must do what He has made known to us (v. 17). We are not asked now to wash each other's feet, but to show the spirit which would lead us to do this service if required of us. We are to love and serve each other, even as He loved us.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. *Learn from this lesson that Christ's love for us is unchanging and everlasting.* He is always thinking of us and trying to impress upon us that He has loved us from the beginning and loves us to the end. We may forget Him, but He never forgets us. He lives still to intercede for us and help us.

2. *We must love others as Christ loves us.* We must show our love by doing to others what He does for us. We must be forbearing, forgiving, and self-denying if we have the spirit of our Master.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

This lesson is full of practical matter, but the teacher should dwell specially on (*a*) the great interest Jesus took in His disciples when He had to leave them,—something like what a father or mother would take in a specially beloved child from whom they were soon to part. (*b*) On the great patience and forbearance He showed in dealing with them. How gentle in reproving them for their faults—how considerate in His manner of teaching them their duty. (*c*) The importance of His example in showing us what we should be. How much happier the world would be if the spirit and example of Jesus were shown in all stages of life and among all classes of men!

XXVI.—JESUS' LAST PASSOVER AND THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER

Matt. xxvi. 17-30 (compare 1 Cor. xi. 23-26)

Revision.—The subject of last lesson was 'Jesus washes the Disciples' Feet.' That was an act of wonderful condescension on the part of Jesus. In this act He set an example, which He wishes us to follow. He commands us to love each other even as He loved us, and by this act He shows how our love to others should manifest itself. If we imitate Him, we will show a kind, loving, and self-denying spirit in dealing with our companions and neighbours.

This incident took place at the beginning of the Supper. (The words 'supper being ended' (John xiii. 2) ought to be 'when supper was prepared,' or 'when supper was.') The lesson to-day refers to the same supper, and shows us what was done after the washing of the feet. It tells us also where the supper was held: and that the occasion of it was the celebration of the Passover.

Sketch of Lesson.—I. Jesus keeps the Passover with His Disciples.—The Passover was an important feast among the Jews. It commemorated the deliverance of the first-born of the Israelites from death, on the night when the destroying angel slew the first-born of all the Egyptians. It commemorated also the deliverance of all the people from Egyptian bondage and their formation into a great nation under Moses (Exod. xii. 1-27).

When it was celebrated for the first time in Egypt, a young lamb, without blemish, which had been separated from the rest of the flock, was slain. Its blood was sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of the houses. Its flesh was roasted and eaten with bitter herbs while the people *stood* with their loins girded, shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand. This was to indicate their readiness for the journey to the promised land of Canaan. In the Saviour's time the people *sat* or *reclined on couches* while they ate this meal (v. 20). This position was taken to indicate that they were no longer slaves but freemen. At first it was a family meal, or two families might join in its celebration according to their number. In the Saviour's time a company of not less than ten and not more than twenty persons might celebrate the feast together as if they were a family. Jesus and His disciples formed such a company. In vv. 17-19 we are informed how the disciples secured a room in which 'they made ready the Passover.' (See Luke xxii. 7-13, where a fuller account is given.) These arrangements were made on 'the day of unleavened bread,' and 'when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve' (v. 20).

What thoughts occupied the mind of Jesus on this occasion? Was He glad at such a time to be surrounded by those who were His most intimate friends? Was He thinking of the great events in the history of the nation which this feast commemorated, and rejoicing like the rest of the Jews? We are told that 'He was troubled in spirit' (John xiii. 21). What could be the cause of this? Could it be fear at the prospect of the sufferings and death which were so near? Could it be the knowledge that this was

the *last* Passover He would eat with His disciples? No. The cause is found in the announcement that He was about to make regarding one of the twelve (v. 21). 'One of you shall betray Me.' The spirit of Jesus 'was troubled' at the thought that Judas, who sat at meat with Him, could be guilty of such a terrible sin as betraying his Lord. His soul was stirred at the sight of such depravity, and His heart was moved with the deepest pity when it became necessary to point out the traitor and pronounce his doom.

The disciples too were affected—'exceeding sorrowful.' They were grieved and afraid, and questioned Jesus and their own hearts (Luke xxii. 23), till He removed all their doubts by pointing out Judas (vv. 21-25). What a sad Passover meal this was! While others were keeping it with joy, Jesus and His disciples kept it with forebodings of sorrow and suffering.

But Jesus and the disciples did not hold their feast with the Passover. He is about to fulfil all that was foreshadowed by the paschal lamb, and to offer Himself a sacrifice for the remission of sin. He intimated this fact by instituting the Lord's Supper, the great feast of the New Covenant.

II. **Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper.**—The Passover which Jesus and His disciples were observing commemorated a past event. It reminded the Israelites of deliverance from death and bondage. But it was understood to be a type or figure which pointed to something yet to come. Through it God revealed to men that **He would save them from sin and death by one who would be 'brought as a lamb to the slaughter'** (Isa. liii.) When Jesus came, John recognised Him as the 'Lamb of God who beareth the sin of the world' (John i. 29). Jesus is called 'our Passover, sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. v. 7). He is the 'Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. xiii. 8). The disciples did not then understand the connection between the Passover and Jesus, but by instituting the Lord's Supper He taught them that He is the true Paschal Lamb. His actions as well as His words conveyed to them this truth.

See what He did (vv. 26-28; compare these with 1 Cor. xi. 23-26). **He took bread,** blessed it, and brake it, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' What could He mean by that action and these words? Luke adds, 'This is My body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.' Paul adds, 'This is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.' **He took also the cup** and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' Luke says that Jesus called the cup 'the New Testament in My blood which is shed for you,' and Paul adds, 'This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.' These words plainly tell the disciples that Jesus is the 'Lamb of God'—that His body is to be broken for them—that His blood is to be shed for them, for the remission of sins. He is the true Passover. After this there should be no more offering of sacrifice for sins, as He is to be 'once offered to bear the sins of many.' After this the paschal meal would have no meaning, but in its place He instituted the Lord's Supper, which should keep up the remembrance of Him and His great sacrifice 'till He come' (1 Cor. xi. 26).

His command has been obeyed. The supper which the Lord instituted on the night on which He was betrayed has been observed in the Church through all the centuries, and will be till the end of time. What

gives it such importance and makes it so precious to Christians in all ages? (1) **It is a memorial of Christ**—very simple, yet enough to remind us that Jesus came into the world to save men. It is a *memorial of His love*—of the great sacrifice which He made for men when He took on Him our nature. It is a *memorial of His death.* Why keep up the memory of His death? Why not rather commemorate His birth, and forget a death which was accomplished by conspiracy and injustice? His death is more important to the world than we can conceive. It was no mere prophet's or martyr's death—no mere bearing testimony to the truth; *it was an offering of Himself in death for the remission of sins.* His death procured for us reconciliation, pardon, peace, eternal life. On this account the Church remembers it. (2) **The Lord's Supper reminds us** not only of Christ suffering and dying for us, but it brings before us the truth **that He gave Himself to us as the Bread of Life.** He has given His body and blood to be the life and nourishment of our souls (John vi. 53-57). As the body lives and gains strength by eating and drinking bread and wine, and by taking them into the system, so the souls of Christians live and grow by receiving Christ into the heart, and becoming through faith 'partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.' (3) **The Lord's Supper also reminds us that Jesus shall come again.** It shows forth His death till He come. Then He shall again renew the personal fellowship which the disciples enjoyed with Him on earth (v. 29).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. *Remember Jesus.*—Remember His holy life, His sympathy with the suffering, His compassion and pity for sinners. He pitied Judas who betrayed Him.

2. *Remember the death of Jesus.*—Do this in the way He ordained as soon as we are able to acknowledge Him as our Master and Saviour. Do this because His death is the *proof* and *measure* of His love for sinners.

3. *Remember that He shall come again.*—We commemorate Him in the Lord's Supper because He is absent, but He has promised to come again to receive us to Himself.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Young children cannot be expected to understand all that is in this lesson. The teacher should dwell specially on the Lord's Supper as a memorial of Jesus, as the deeper meaning can hardly be comprehended by them. The idea of a memorial can be easily illustrated. Reference to the paschal supper. It was a memorial of the saving of the first-born, of national freedom. Men remembered for heroic deeds—warriors, philanthropists for benevolence, martyrs for adherence to truth and religion—Jesus for His great love to sinners,—for giving up His life for them.

FAREWELL DISCOURSE TO THE DISCIPLES

XXVII.—THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

John xiv. 1-14

Revision.—Jesus had kept the Passover for the last time. At the same feast He instituted the Lord's Supper. He thereby intimated to the disciples that His work on earth was finished; He was soon to be put to death for the sake of sinners. How did He show this in the Sacrament? The words of the institution plainly declare it. He said, 'This is My body, which is *broken for you*,' and 'this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is *shed for you*.' They were to observe this supper in *remembrance of Him*, and by it they were to 'show the Lord's death till He come.' The disciples were downcast at the thought of His death; His going away filled their minds with sadness. They felt like children about to lose father or mother. So He spoke to them a farewell discourse, part of which forms this lesson.

Sketch of Lesson.—The disciples were still in the upper room; Judas had left them to complete his cruel work; the others were 'exceeding sorrowful' at the circumstances in which they were parting from their Lord. Though He had often spoken of dying, or being slain, yet the event had come upon them unexpectedly. His death and all the circumstances connected with it were mysteries. His announcement that they would all forsake Him, that Peter would deny Him, and that Judas had already betrayed Him, so amazed and shocked them that they were stricken helpless with sorrow and dismay. Though Jesus had much to trouble Him at the time, and had in His own sufferings enough to engross all His thoughts, yet He did not think of Himself and tried to comfort His disciples by leading their thoughts up to God His Father.

Jesus comforted His disciples—

I. **By asking them to have Faith in God and also in Himself** (v. 1).—They already believed in God; they had trusted Him in the past, and had found consolation in so doing; let them continue this trust in God in the midst of all their troubles and mysteries, and their hearts would find comfort. No one can despair or fail to find comfort in sorrow and strength in weakness who believes in a God who loves and cares for him. To have perfect faith in God as a Father, and to have peace in their hearts, Jesus asked the disciples to believe also in Himself. At this trying and mysterious period of His history their faith in Him was severely tested. Their hopes were disappointed; there was to be no earthly glory, but rather shame and suffering. He was not the earthly king whom they expected the Messiah to be. Jesus asked them not to allow disappointment to overthrow faith. *Let them still trust Him.* They knew enough to be convinced that He loved them—that He was to lay down His life for them—that He would not make promises regarding the future kingdom of God, and regarding the glory and blessedness that were to result from His sufferings and death,

unless He were sure of their fulfilment. So He said, 'Let not your hearts be troubled.'

II. **By directing them to His Father's House** (vv. 2, 3).—After His sufferings He would enter into glory; when He departed from them He would return to His Father. He would be separated from them, but the separation would not be final. They would be left on earth, and He would go to heaven. Both earth and heaven are mansions in His Father's house, for the Father's presence is everywhere. In His Father's house there are many mansions, but they would not be left to dwell in a mansion apart from Him. It was already arranged that He and all His people were to dwell in the same heavenly home. If the separation about to take place had been to be lasting and final He would not have hid it from them. Instead of this being the case, the purpose of His departure is to make provision for them being received into the mansions of His Father's house. *Let them still trust Him.* Though taken from them He would never forget them; He would come again to them to take them with Him to the home prepared, where they would remain with Him for ever.

III. **By revealing the Way to the Father** (vv. 4-6).—Jesus assumed that the disciples understood what He had said about the 'Father's house,' and also that they knew how to get there. Thomas, one of the disciples, declared that he did not know *where* Jesus was going, and asked, 'How can we know the way?' The answer of Jesus removed all doubt on this point. He took no notice of the *place*, which perhaps was occupying too much of the attention of Thomas, but directed Him to the *person* to whom He was going—*the Father*. The place is nothing; Jesus is going to the Father—no one can come to the Father but by Him; so He said to Thomas, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' The answer contained more information than Thomas asked for, and shows that Jesus had an absolute right to ask the disciples to put *entire trust in Him*. It means not only that Jesus is the *true* and *living Way*, but that He is in Himself all that men need to enable them to come to the Father. He has reconciled them to God, and made it possible for them to come into His presence as children coming to a father. He has opened the way by which God can be just and the Justifier of all who believe. He has revealed the true character of God, and shown the relationship in which He stands to men. He has shown Him to be our Father, who loves us and desires our salvation. He has brought 'life and immortality' to light. He came to give life to men; He died 'that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John x. 10). He who gives life and enables men to enter into communion and fellowship with God; He who has revealed the true nature of God, and His love for men; He who has removed all obstacles which separated men from God, and has become the 'Mediator between God and men,' is the Life, the Truth, and the Way to the Father.

IV. **By showing that the Father is revealed in His Person** (vv. 7-11).—From the question of Thomas it is evident that the disciples did not yet rightly know Jesus, so He revealed to them the connection between Him and His Father (v. 7). This declaration gave no light to Philip, so he said, 'Lord, show us the Father.' The ignorance and blindness of the

disciples astonished Jesus. He had been among them, teaching them who the Father is, revealing His true character, showing them His love, and grace, and truth; yet they had not known Him, and so did not know the Father! The answer of Jesus to the request of Philip is, Look at Me; 'I am in the Father, and the Father in Me'; I am a revelation of the Father (John i. 18). **'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'** (v. 9).

V. **By showing what great Results would be accomplished by them if they believed in God and believed also in Him** (vv. 12-14).—They thought they would be helpless when He was taken from them. Instead of that, the spiritual results of their labours would be greater than any that had followed His. They thought they could get no help from Him when He was out of sight. Instead of that, anything asked in His name in connection with the kingdom of heaven would be given them.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. *In all times of sorrow or trouble seek comfort and peace by a firm trust in God as He is revealed to us in Christ.* Trust Him as a child trusts his father; we can only do this when we believe also in Christ who has made Him known to us in this character.

2. *Let us remember that though Jesus is absent from earth, He cares for us still, and has prepared for our being with Him after faithful service here.*

3. *Walk in Him who is* 'the Way,' *be true to Him who is* 'the Truth,' *and live in Him who is* 'the Life.'

4. *Ask with faith any spiritual blessing we need from Him.* Pray, and believing we shall receive.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

After giving a summary of the lesson, direct attention to the great love which Jesus showed for His disciples in seeking to comfort them when He had so much sorrow and suffering pressing on His own heart.

FAREWELL DISCOURSE TO THE DISCIPLES

XXVIII.—THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John xv. 1-8

Revision.—The subject of last lesson was '*The Way, the Truth, and the Life.*' Jesus is to men all that is meant by these three things. He is **the Way** to the Father, and to the Father's house in which there are many mansions. He only can make known to men **the Truth** about the Father. He is 'full of grace and truth,' and has shown us His glory (John i. 14, 18). He said to Philip, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?' 'I am in the Father, and the Father in Me' (John xiv. 9-11). He only can give **Eternal Life** to men. 'In Him was life,' and He alone can bring men into living union with the Father. What a glorious revelation of grace and truth is given in Jesus Christ! All must know now who the Father is, and the way to Him. The disciples should understand now what Jesus means when He speaks about going to His Father's house, and though they may not be able to see Him, they ought still to believe in Him, as He gave them the assurance that He would still continue to do anything for them that they would ask in His name, 'that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' The present lesson shows how He would still be united to them.

Sketch of Lesson.—The disciples were still troubled at the thought of being separated from Jesus. Henceforth He would be in heaven and they would be on earth; how then could He continue to help them as He had done when among them? In this lesson Jesus teaches them that there is a sense in which they can never be separated from Him. Separation by space cannot break the bond of love which unites hearts. The father loves his children, and thinks of them and works for them, though separated from them by thousands of miles. Father in America—children at home—yet a real living bond of love unites them. Even so in Jesus' case. Separation from His heavenly Father when He came to live among men did not hinder Him from abiding in the Father. In this sense Jesus and His disciples will always be united to each other while He abides in them and they abide in Him. Love binds them to each other. He has chosen them and made them His disciples for a great purpose. They are to glorify the Father and bring forth fruit in the world. They can only do this by continuing to abide in Him in love. The union between Him and them is a necessity. To illustrate the nature of this union, and the important results that depended on its continuance, Jesus made use of the similitude of 'the vine and the branches.' The similitude would be easily understood by the disciples. The vine was a common tree in their country, yet it required to be cultivated with great care, and needed the constant attendance of the vine-dresser. In order to be fruitful, it was generally planted in a good situation, and protected from injury (Ps. lxxx. 8-16; Isa. v. 1-6) by an enclosure which guarded it from thieves and wild animals. Several times in the year it was pruned: when all the green and vigorous suckers

which drew away the sap from the fruit-bearing branches were removed; all dry and useless branches were cut off; and even the branches that promised to bear fruit were carefully gone over, and everything that injured their growth or checked their fruitfulness was taken away by the pruning-hook. Turning the attention of the disciples to the vine, He showed them how this tree and its branches set forth the relationship which exists between Him and them and all His people. He called Himself the true Vine (v. 1).

I. **'I am the true Vine'** (v. 1).—In the Old Testament, Israel or the Jewish Church had been called a vine, and all the members of it were branches. God had done a great deal for this vine (Ps. lxxx.), yet it had 'turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine' (Jer. ii. 21). Israel was not the true vine; Jesus claimed to be that. He came from God to dwell among men—to impart to them spiritual life—to enable them to become the sons of God, and to give them out of His fulness grace and truth (John i. 12-17). What the vine sets forth figuratively, Jesus is in reality. He said, 'I am the true vine,'—true in the sense that He is the original—the essential Vine, in the kingdom of God, and there is nothing typical or imperfect in Him. What does this similitude teach us about Jesus? Does it not bring before us the fact that 'He emptied Himself' of His glory in order to become the source of life to men? The *appearance of the vine* is not the *most imposing*. Its stock and trailing branches cannot be compared with the trunk and boughs of the cedar or the oak. Yet this tree which has such a mean appearance produces the most precious and strengthening of all fruits. *To outward appearance Jesus was not attractive.* He was described 'as a tender plant—a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him' (Isa. liii. 2). Yet this 'tender plant' is 'the true Vine,' and produces 'out of the dry ground' the precious fruits of righteousness and eternal life. Jesus called His disciples the branches of the true Vine.

II. **'Ye are the branches'** (v. 5).—What bond of union exists between the branches and the vine? The branches are not *tied on* to the tree, they *grow out of it*, or they must be *grafted into it*; and become a part of it, drawing from it all its nourishment and life. In the case of the vine the branches grow out of the tree for the purpose of bearing fruit. If they fail in this they are useless. The disciples could not fail to see the meaning of this. Jesus taught them now that they are united to Him as the branch is to the vine. The union which exists between Him and them is not dependent on external conditions, such as living under the same roof, but is a real living union, formed by love and faith in Him who is to supply them with life and strength. On the continuance of this union depends their usefulness in the kingdom of God. As the branch must abide in the vine, and as the sap of the vine must flow through the branches to bring forth the clusters of glorious grapes, so the disciples must abide in Jesus in order to do work for Him in the world. They must let His love and grace permeate all their powers of body and soul and spirit, and produce in their lives the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In this way they will glorify the Father by producing much fruit, and shall prove that they are the disciples of Jesus—branches of the true Vine.

Jesus showed further that God the Father is the Owner and Cultivator of the true Vine and the branches.

III. **'My Father is the Husbandman'** (vv. 1, 2).—God is not merely the *Vine-dresser*, He is also the *Proprietor*. He sent His Son into the world. He planted Him among men as the true Vine, and all who are brought into union with Him are *under the care of the Husbandman*. He seeks to make the Vine fruitful—(*a*) By taking away barren branches, such as suckers or young sprouts that grow vigorously, but make only wood and weaken the vine. (*b*) By removing excrescences from fruit-bearing branches, by pruning away all excessive growth upon them, and thus allowing the sap to be used in increasing the fruit (v. 2). (*c*) By casting forth withered branches, and causing them to be gathered and burned, so that no decaying matter may be productive of injury to the other branches. By the dressing and pruning work of the Father, Jesus taught the disciples that suffering and discipline and severe chastisements would require to be endured by them as His disciples. He could accomplish His work and glorify the Father only through suffering. Let them remember that, and when trials came upon them, look on them as sent to cleanse and purge them. They are proofs of the Father's love. They are sent to make them 'partakers of His holiness,' and should produce in them 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness' (Heb. xii. 6-11).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

This lesson is addressed to us as well as to the disciples, and shows—(1) *The necessity of being united to Jesus.* We become united to Him when we trust Him, love Him, and keep His commandments. What unites us to our parents, friends? (2) *This union must continue all our lives.* We must abide in Christ and He in us. We must have fellowship with Him, and can only do this by loving Him as our Lord and Saviour, getting grace and strength from Him. (3) *We must honour God and prove our discipleship by bringing forth fruit.* Outward profession is not fruit; but 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance' (Gal. v. 22, 23).

God sometimes sends troubles and trials to us to make us better, and make us seek closer fellowship and union with Jesus.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Try to make the youngest children understand how Jesus wishes His disciples and all His people to love Him though He is away from earth. Illustrate how they can love father or mother, though not seeing them for a time. Show that this love and remembrance form a union—how always thinking of the loved one makes us live to please Him. This is fruit. Make use of the similitude contained in the lesson.

FAREWELL DISCOURSE TO THE DISCIPLES

XXIX.—PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John xiv. 15-27; xvi. 5-15

Introduction.—The feeling of the disciples, in view of the departure of Jesus, was that they would be left alone in the world. They felt like orphan children, who had no one to comfort and help them, and the thought of their utter helplessness made them downcast and troubled. Though they were not able to understand Him, Jesus tried to show them that He would not desert them. He would return to them in spirit; and in virtue of His fellowship with the Father, would dwell in them and they in Him. To impress this vividly upon their hearts He revealed to them that new relations would be established between Him and them after His departure. They were henceforth to *pray in His name.* As a *Mediator* and *Intercessor*, He would possess great power. He promised to give them a proof of this. 'If ye love Me, and keep My commandments,' He said, 'I will pray the Father, and He shall give you **another Comforter,** that He may abide with you for ever.'

Sketch of Lesson.—The first part of the lesson (xiv. 15-27) was spoken immediately after Jesus had shown the disciples that He is 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life,' and that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. In it He shows that the *love* of the *Father*, the *manifestation* of the *Father*, and *fellowship* with the *Father* can be obtained only through Him (vv. 20-23). He also shows that *no gift* can come to men from the Father *except through Him.* It was because *He* would pray the Father, that He would give them *another Comforter.* He who had been their Friend and Helper and Teacher in the past must leave them, but through Him they would get *another*, who would be their Comforter or Advocate, and who would remain with them for ever.

I. **Who is this Comforter?**—He is 'the Spirit of truth' (xiv. 17)—the Source of all truth—the Revealer of all truth. He can be seen and known by those only with whom He dwells. The disciples had both seen and known this Spirit partially; for the truths concerning the kingdom of God which they had received had been received through Him; and this prepared them for the reception of more truth. The Comforter is also the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in Jesus' name. The Holy Ghost is a person sent from the Father, in answer to the prayer of Jesus, to those who are the disciples of Jesus. He will give them not only help and strength, but instruction and enlightenment. He will teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Jesus had said to them (v. 26). When the disciples had the promise of such a Comforter—one who was to be Helper, Teacher, and Friend—one who was to remain with them for ever—their hearts ought to be no longer troubled, and their minds ought to be prepared to receive Christ's parting gift, 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you' (v. 27).

In the second part of the lesson (xvi. 5-15) Jesus shows

II. **That He must depart before the Comforter can come** (vv. 5-7).—He had already proved to the disciples that His departure was a necessity. He could not finish His work by any other way than by death. But the necessity for His death did not reconcile them to the fact. They did not ask explanations as they had done before (xiv. 5). They were filled with sorrow. Hence Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I depart.' This they could not understand. Could He not remain and also pray the Father to send the Comforter? Would it not be better for them to have both Jesus and the Comforter with them at the same time? Jesus showed that cannot be. His work must be finished before the Holy Ghost can come; so He said, 'If I do not depart, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send Him unto you.' It was expedient for them that He should depart, because they would really never understand the true nature of Christ and the meaning of His life till He was taken away from them. [Illustrate by showing how poets, patriots, and others are often more honoured after death than during life. We see the greatness of the genius and noble spirit of such men when looked at apart from the individual, whose peculiarities or failings prevented us from setting a proper value on them.] In a far higher sense this is true of Jesus. His departure from earth turned the eyes of men from the poor, persecuted, suffering Nazarene, and fixed their attention on the holiness and love, patience and self-sacrifice of His life, which were almost obscured by His humble circumstances. It was also expedient for them that Jesus should depart and the Comforter come, as He only could fit them for their future work. They were to represent Christ in establishing the kingdom of God in the world, and they needed the teaching and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to enable them to do that. We will see how He did this when we consider

III. **What is the work of the Comforter** (vv. 8-15).—His work is here set forth in a double aspect.

1. *He will produce great effects on the world* (vv. 8-11). He will convince them 'of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' He will show that *unbelief in Jesus is sin against God. Rejecting* Jesus means rejecting *all* that is *holy* and *loving* and *godlike. He will convince the world of righteousness.* After Jesus has gone to the Father and is exalted to the right hand of God, the world will be convinced that they had 'denied the Holy One and the Just,' 'and killed the Prince of Life' (Acts iii. 14, 15; vii. 52). The Spirit sets forth the righteousness of Jesus, shows men how that may become theirs, and works in all who believe to produce that righteousness in their hearts. *He will convince the world of judgment.* In the judgment and condemnation of Jesus the innocent was condemned. Sin seemed to prevail over holiness; the prince of this world seemed to gain the victory over the Prince of Peace. But the coming of the Spirit and His work in the world prove that righteousness and justice have been established, though the innocent was condemned, and that Jesus has gained the victory over the prince of this world.

2. *The work of the Holy Spirit was also to be manifested in the great influence He would exercise over the disciples* (vv. 12-15). Jesus had still

much to teach them, but they were not prepared to receive it. When the Spirit came He would become their Teacher, and would guide them 'into all truth.' This shows us (*a*) the way in which Christ revealed Himself to men as they were fitted to receive it. The same method would be adopted by the Spirit. [Illustrate. Show how we teach children—how we instruct men—how we take into account the capacity of the learners.] It shows (*b*) the subject of the Spirit's revelation. 'He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you.' The work of the Spirit is to reveal Christ to men. What a revelation He gave of Jesus to the disciples! Think of the change in their views of His person, mission, death, nature of His kingdom, their own work in the world. It shows (*c*) the end of all the Spirit's work; 'He shall glorify Me.' Glorify Him by revealing His character—setting forth the greatness of His love,—leading men to embrace Jesus as their Saviour, and producing His likeness in their souls.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. See the great love of Jesus to His disciples in sending the Holy Spirit, who was the Comforter of whom they stood in need. This Comforter or Helper was sent for us as well as for them. He stands by us, helps us, strengthens us, enlightens us. We need Him as much as the disciples did, and He will come to dwell in us if we pray for Him, and open our hearts to Him. Let us every day seek the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. Show that the Spirit will dwell with us, and reveal Jesus to us, only when our hearts are fit for His habitation, and our minds prepared for the reception of the truth.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It is difficult for young children to understand what is meant by the person and work of the Holy Spirit. They can follow us when we speak of the Father or the Son, but fail to apprehend our meaning when we speak of the Spirit. Try to help them by representing the Spirit as the Teacher, the Helper, or the Friend whom Jesus sent to take His place after His departure. Show what the teacher or friend does to them in absence of parents, and point out that the Holy Spirit did the same for the disciples in absence of Jesus, and will do the same for us.

XXX.—JESUS' AGONY AND BETRAYAL

Matt. xxvi. 36-56 ; Mark xiv. 32-50 ; Luke xxii. 39-54 ; John xviii. 1-12

Read Matt. xxvi. 36-56

Introduction.—This lesson brings before us a very mysterious part in the life of Jesus. He had just finished His farewell discourse. Through the whole of the discourse and the prayer which followed it (John xvii.), Jesus, in the anticipation of His sufferings and death, exhibited a confidence and serenity of spirit which show that He was fully assured of the love and sympathy of His Heavenly Father. He knew that He was not alone : His Father was with Him.

After the discourse and the prayer Jesus went forth with His disciples (John xviii. 1). They crossed the brook Kedron and came to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus still seemed calm and resigned. He still showed an interest in His disciples, and said to them, 'Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.' How like Jesus ! His disciples were to rest while He went to pray. On other occasions when He went to pray, He went alone (John vi. 15 ; Mark vi. 46). On this occasion He did not wish to be alone ; He took with Him Peter, James, and John. They had been selected at other times to witness special events in the life of Jesus. [Recall them.] This fact ought to have made them expect that something important was about to happen. They went, and were witnesses of

I. **The Agony of Jesus.**—1. **Think of what the Saviour now suffered.**

He became in their presence the 'Man of sorrows.' The peace and confidence, which He possessed a short time before, gave place to trouble and wavering. He no longer looked like one who had 'overcome the world,' and bid others 'be of good cheer'; 'He began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy.' The heaviness and amazement were caused by some special sorrow. He who formerly spoke of 'My peace' and 'My joy' said, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' He sought sympathy from His three disciples—'Tarry ye here, and watch with Me.' Was Jesus afraid to be alone ? Having gone a little distance from them He fell on His face and prayed. What was the cause of all this trouble ? What was the subject of His prayer ?

It was some cup that He had to drink. The cup seemed to be full of some horrors from which His soul shrank. The thought of drinking it caused Him terrible agony. His body suffered the greatest exhaustion through the sorrow of His soul, 'and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground' (Luke xxii. 44). When this great sorrow came upon Jesus, what did He do ? Did He seek the sympathy of His disciples only ? No. He went to His Heavenly Father. The cup of suffering was before Him—His soul was filled with horror at the prospect of having to drink it, but He would not refuse till He knew the will of His Father. Three times He prayed regarding it. Each prayer showed that He was 'troubled in spirit,' and eagerly desired that 'this cup' might pass from Him 'if it be possible.' Each prayer also expressed His

readiness to submit to the will of His Father. He said, 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt,' 'If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.'

What could this cup be, the drinking of which caused the Saviour such terrible agony? It was not the endurance of the physical sufferings which awaited Him—not the shame and pain of the death on the cross, though these were enough to make 'the Holy One and the Just' turn away from them with horror. Suffering and death, because they are the wages of sin, must have been more repulsive to Christ, who had no sin, and over whom death had no claim, than to other men. But **there was more in the cup of sorrow which Jesus had to drink than physical suffering and death, He was to suffer for sin—the just for the unjust.** He was to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, and on Him was to be laid the iniquity of us all. What that means we do not know. It is a mystery to us, and it caused Jesus to pray, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.' This did not indicate any desire on the part of Jesus to draw back from the work, which *He had* undertaken, of redeeming a sinful world. He knew beforehand all the suffering He would have to endure, as He had been suffering from the very beginning. But He did not wish to endure any unnecessary suffering. He left Himself in the hands of the righteous Father. In the most trying moments of His agony He was able to say, 'My Father.' He never for a moment forgot that He could rely on the Father's love and wisdom. Whatever the Father willed, He would do. The most prominent thought in His prayers is, 'Thy will be done.' By this submission to the will of the Father He gained the victory in this contest. He overcame the enemy who tempted Him to draw back from suffering. He offered Himself, in doing the will of God, as a sacrifice which is pleasing and acceptable in His sight. Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered (Heb. v. 8, 9).

2. **While the Saviour was enduring all this agony, what were the three disciples doing?** They were asked to watch, and to pray. Three times Jesus came to them, possibly expecting sympathy, or to be strengthened by the knowledge of their faithfulness in watching; but each time they were asleep! He trod the wine-press alone; in His sufferings He found no human sympathy! Even His three most intimate disciples had failed to watch; yet He did not blame them. They had seen part. They had seen, in witnessing the agony of Jesus and His submission to the will of the Father, the most perfect manifestation that could be given of divine love—Christ's love for sinful men. He aroused them out of their sleep to behold the most fiendish manifestation of hatred and wickedness, in Judas coming with an armed band to complete

II. **The Betrayal of Jesus.**—A few hours before, Judas had left the upper room. Some thought to buy things required for the feast, or to give alms to the poor. He had gone to the chief priests. He wished to complete the bargain he had made with them some days previously. He told them the time had come. That night they might capture Jesus if they desired it. They must have made their arrangements hastily. At the time when Judas came to them they would be eating the Paschal Supper. But the chance of seizing Jesus without causing a tumult could not be resisted.

A band was soon collected, among whom were priests, elders, officers and servants of the chief priests' households, and some Roman soldiers.

These, under the guidance of Judas, entered Gethsemane. Judas thought He would be there, and thinking the disciples might be with Him, he arranged with the captors to point out Jesus by a kiss. What a perfect specimen of a traitor Judas was! A traitor pretends to be our friend, while he is our enemy and plots our hurt. As a rule, in the end he shows his malice and glories in it by some open proof of his hatred. Judas kept up his appearance of friendship to the last. He betrayed his Lord and Saviour with a kiss. Can you imagine anything more fiendish than this? A few hours before, Jesus washed his feet, and allowed him to eat at the same table with Him. He had warned him of his danger in plotting against Himself, and tried to save him from his own evil heart; yet he came with a band to apprehend Him, and said, 'Hail, Master,' and kissed Him.

Jesus permitted him to kiss Him—gave His cheek to be kissed by a traitor, and even then called him friend! What wonderful forbearance! What infinite condescension! What voluntary submission to His enemies! His love to sinners and desire to do the will of God caused Him to endure all this, for if He had wished it, legions of angels would have come to His defence. Here truly is love that passeth knowledge! Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be taken and led 'as a lamb to the slaughter' (Isa. liii. 7, 8).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. Learn from the example of Jesus that our first duty is perfect obedience to the will of our Heavenly Father. Obedience may call for self-denial, may involve suffering, may be adverse to our personal interest; yet like Jesus we must learn obedience by the things which we suffer.

2. Learn the greatness of Christ's love to sinners when He voluntarily endured such sufferings for them. How His love was tested! His nation rejected Him, Judas betrayed Him, yet love endured to the end.

3. Take warning from the case of Judas. His betrayal was the basest of all sins. Once he would have scorned the thought of such an act. After his fall, who can be sure of safety? Pray for strength to resist all worldly temptations.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

This lesson presents two scenes which form a perfect contrast. (*a*) The love of Jesus for sinners—shown in the agony which He endured, and His patient submission to His enemies. (*b*) The malice and hatred of Judas against Jesus, who had been a kind Master, a loving Friend, and who was anxious to save him from his fate. Some use might be made of this: *love on the part of Jesus*, enduring mysterious suffering in order to do the will of God and procure salvation of sinners; *hatred on the part of Judas*, violating the law of God and human friendship, in order to satisfy its malice, and make some paltry gain—a few pieces of silver. Surely we should love Jesus, who has shown so much love for us!

XXXI.—JESUS AND THE SANHEDRIN

Matt. xxvi. 57-68; Mark xiv. 53-65; Luke xxii. 66-71; John xviii. 19-23

Introduction.—Part of last lesson dealt with the betrayal of Jesus. Judas had gone to the chief priests and made arrangements with them to capture his Master. He received from them a 'band' of soldiers—some officers of the temple—and some of the chief priests' servants. With these he went to the garden of Gethsemane, where he supposed Jesus would be. The priests were determined that Jesus should not escape; so they provided those sent to take Him with torches and weapons. They pretended to be afraid that He would raise a tumult among the people; so they sent out an armed band to arrest Him, hoping that this would give some basis for the charge of sedition which they meant to bring against Him. This attempt to bring suspicion on Jesus failed. He was found by those who were sent to apprehend Him in the company of His disciples only. After securing the safety of the disciples, He gave Himself up into the hands of His enemies, asking why they had come to take Him with swords and staves 'as against a thief.' After they had bound Him they 'led Him, and brought Him into the high priest's house' (Luke xxii. 54).

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **The Examination of Jesus by Annas** (John xviii. 19-23).—Annas had once been high priest, but had been deposed. Probably the Jews still looked on him as the real high priest, though Caiaphas, his son-in-law—the high priest for 'that same year'—was recognised by the Roman governor. On this account they took Jesus to Annas *first* (v. 13). Annas presumed that he had a right to examine Jesus. He asked Him about His disciples and doctrine. Many disciples? Did they openly profess to follow Him? What was the nature of His teaching? What did He mean by the kingdom of heaven? These questions meant to entrap Jesus—to get Him to say something that might give grounds for a charge of *secret sedition*. Instead of answering the questions of Annas, Jesus appealed to His public career. He had spoken *openly* to the world—in the synagogues and the temple where the people resort—in *secret* He had done nothing. If Annas wished to know what Jesus taught, let him ask them that heard Him. Jesus claimed here a fair trial. His work was done in public; and if any charge was to be brought against Him, witnesses should be called to prove it. Instead of bearing witness, an officer 'who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest Thou the high priest so?' Jesus protested against this treatment by asking still for a fair trial and just judgment. Let them bear witness if He has done evil, but why smite Him if He has done well?

II. **The Trial and Examination of Jesus before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin** (read Matt. xxvi. 57-68).—After Jesus had been examined by Annas, He was led to the house of Caiaphas, who was the official high priest. As such he was president of the Sanhedrin. [The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. It was composed of seventy members—priests, scribes, and elders—and a president—the high priest. Once it had

great power, but the Roman governors had reduced it; and had taken from it the right to put any one to death.]

In prospect of the *capture and trial of Jesus*, Caiaphas had summoned a meeting of the council, though it was then after midnight. Before the council, Jesus was brought in to be tried. His hands were bound, He was closely guarded, and was treated as a malefactor; yet we are not told what they accused Him of, or that they had any charge against Him. He had fallen into their hands, and by fair means or foul He must die. From the very beginning of His ministry the chief priests and the council had opposed Jesus; but from the time when He raised Lazarus from the dead, they had determined to put Him to death. *Caiaphas led the council when they formed this resolution* (John xi. 47-53). Immediately after Jesus entered into Jerusalem in procession, and claimed to have authority in His Father's house by cleansing the temple, '*the chief priests and scribes* . . . sought how they might destroy Him' (Mark xi. 18). In carrying out their wicked purpose, they had arranged with Judas to betray Him (Luke xxii. 2-6).

When He stood before them, as a prisoner on his trial, *they had made up their minds to pronounce the sentence of death.* They found it difficult, however, to frame a charge so criminal as to justify His condemnation. They tried to do this—(1) *by seeking out false witnesses* (v. 59). The Sanhedrin ought to have given Jesus a fair trial; they ought to have taken special care that nothing but the truth was spoken against the accused. It was their duty to promote justice, and to punish false witnesses (Deut. xix. 16-19). Yet in trying Jesus they seek out false witnesses. For a time this device failed. Many witnesses came, but their evidence differed so much, it could not be received (Mark xiv. 56). At last two came who agreed as the law required (Deut. xix. 15). By *misrepresenting* and *changing* words which Jesus had spoken at the beginning of His ministry, they gave false testimony against Him. Speaking prophetically of His death and resurrection, He had said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John ii. 19). The witnesses declared they had heard this fellow say, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days' (v. 61). This evidence was *false*; but it was held to prove blasphemy, and contempt for the temple, which was a great offence among the Jews (Acts vi. 13). We cannot fail to mark the meekness and patience shown by Jesus while He was being falsely accused. He could have proved His innocence, but the council did not want proof of that, so He was silent (Isa. liii. 7). The silence of Jesus was perplexing for His judges. The chief priest said, 'Answerest Thou nothing?' 'But Jesus held His peace.' What could they do next? They had not yet got evidence on which they could found a criminal or political charge that would justify death.

Such evidence must be got, and they tried to get this—(2) *by examining Jesus.* 'The high priest stood up in the midst,' 'and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God' (v. 63). Under such circumstances Jesus could no longer hold His peace. Though a prisoner at the bar, bound and defenceless,—though poor and despised—He was the Christ, the promised Messiah, and the Son of God. The meek and patient Man

showed before His judges that He was conscious of power and majesty; He declared Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God; and He said besides, 'Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven' (v. 64). The high priest and the Sanhedrin knew the meaning of these words. It was promised to the Messiah that He would sit on the Lord's right hand (Ps. cx. 1); and it was prophesied that 'One like the Son of man' would come 'with the clouds of heaven' (Daniel vii. 13, 14). In claiming this power and glory, Jesus strengthened the declaration that He is the Christ, the Son of God. How dare this poor, despised Nazarene at their bar make such a declaration!

It is enough. 'He hath spoken blasphemy,' exclaimed the high priest; and to show his horror and indignation he rent his clothes. All agreed with this conclusion, and declared concerning Jesus, 'He is guilty of death' (vv. 65, 66). They did not attempt to prove that His claim to be the Messiah was false; they did not examine the evidence by which He established His claim—viz. His works, miracles, doctrine, life. Notice how they treated Jesus after His examination.

III. **His cruel Treatment and unjust Condemnation.**—The meeting of the council at which Jesus was examined was adjourned till the morning, when a formal and legal meeting was convened. In the interval Jesus was treated with insolence and disgrace. He was innocent, the victim of malice and cruelty and wickedness; He ought to have had the sympathy of all, yet they spat in His face, they buffeted Him, they covered His face, and having struck Him, ridiculed His being a prophet by asking Him to prophesy who smote Him. The members of the Sanhedrin showed their terrible malignity in allowing Jesus to be thus abused before He had been formally pronounced guilty. When morning dawned (Matt. xxvii. 1; Luke xxii. 66) the council again met. The declaration that Jesus had formerly made was adhered to by Him. Without any evidence of His having done evil, without any proof that His claim to be the Christ was false, the supreme court of the Jews—composed of chief priest, scribes, and the elders of the people—condemned Him to be guilty of blasphemy, 'and took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death.' What a mockery of justice this trial was! What a manifestation of malice, cruelty, and all wickedness was shown by the leaders and rulers of the people! What an example of patience and forbearance, and love, and submission to the will of God was given by Jesus!

PRACTICAL LESSON

Christ suffered for us. An example of patient endurance, resignation, and faith in the righteousness of God (1 Pet. ii. 21-23).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In teaching this lesson pass over the examination by Annas (I.), and direct attention to II. and III. Children naturally like fair play, so show how unfairly Jesus was treated by His judges, and how cruelly He suffered when He was buffeted. Bound, blindfolded, helpless, He was made the sport of wicked men. He endured all this for us!

XXXII.—PETER'S DENIAL OF JESUS

Matt. xxvi. 69-75; Mark xiv. 66-72; Luke xxii. 54-62; John xviii. 15-18, 25-27

Read Luke xxii. 54-62

Introduction.—If we were asked who among the disciples was most likely to be faithful to Jesus during His trial and sufferings, we would answer, Peter. He was brave, fearless of danger, and a true friend. He was the first to declare Jesus to be 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. xvi. 16). He was always ready to serve, and forward in expressing his devotion to Jesus. Sometimes he spoke imprudently, but his imprudence expressed his love to his Lord. When Jesus first intimated to the disciples that He must go up to Jerusalem, must suffer, be put to death, Peter rebuked Him. He could not imagine such things happening to 'the Christ' (Matt. xvi. 21-23). When Jesus told them that all would take offence at Him—all forsake Him—Peter asserted, 'Though all men forsake Thee, yet not I.' 'I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death.' What greater proof of devotion could Peter give! When Jesus warned him that he would be *specially tempted*, but that He had prayed for Him, he seemed to think the warning and prayer unnecessary. He still declared his readiness to die for Jesus. When Jesus answered, 'Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? . . . The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice,'—Peter continued to have confidence in himself, and did not prepare for the temptation. He took his sword with him when he went out with Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane. When the band came to take Jesus he drew his sword 'and smote the high priest's servant.' This rash act showed his zeal and devotion to his Lord, his readiness to help Him—to die for Him. But Jesus did not wish such help. His hour had now come. The Father had put the cup of suffering into His hand and He must drink it. He desired His disciples to love Him, to continue faithful and true while He suffered. His enemies would make Him a prisoner—condemn and put Him to death. Let the disciples still believe in Him. By doing this they would strengthen Him. This they did not do—'all forsook Him and fled.' Even Peter's faith failed; fear seized him; like a coward he deserted his Lord. This indication of weakness should have warned Peter. Our lesson shows that he had to pass through greater trials before his confidence in his own courage and strength could be destroyed.

I. **Peter's Sin. He denied his Lord three times** (vv. 54-60).—Peter joined the others when they forsook Jesus; but did not entirely desert Him. He felt that it was cowardly to forsake the Master, whom he loved so much that he was ready to go with Him to prison or to death. He was ashamed at having shown fear, so he turned after the crowd. More cautious now, he **'followed afar off.'** He continued to follow till he came to the high priest's house; Jesus was led in there. John, who had also followed, and who was known to the household of the high priest, got admission; but Peter stood without. What were his thoughts now? Will he follow Jesus to prison and to death? Yes. His courage and self-confidence had again returned. He would never again be ashamed of his Lord. He would prove that he was able to do what he had said; he would follow Jesus wherever He went.

Through John speaking to the maid who kept the door, Peter was admitted to the high priest's palace. Still following Jesus. Who could doubt his courage and his love for Jesus when he exposed himself to such dangers for His sake? Peter passed through the porch from the door to the court. This is a space in the centre of the house, open to the sky. It is on a lower level than the floor of the rooms which open out from it on all sides. In the middle of this court the servants of the high priest made a fire and sat round it. **Peter went and stood or sat among them.** What makes him look troubled, uneasy, anxious to be away from the light? The maid who kept the door has come to the fire; she has fixed her eyes on Peter. She remembered John had brought him in, so she said to those around, pointing to Peter, 'This man was also with Him.' Surrounded by the enemies of Jesus, who might treat him as a spy, fear overcame Peter, and (1) '**he denied Him, saying, Woman, I know Him not.**' He denied Him with a lie.

Peter felt that it was no longer safe to remain in this company. As soon as he could move without being noticed ('after a little while,' v. 58), **he went out into the porch** (Matt., Mark). It was dark there; perhaps he might get the opportunity of leaving the house; at least not so easily known in the darkness. A maid again accused him—'This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth' (Matt.) A man who heard this said, 'Thou art also of them.' (2) '**And Peter said, Man, I am not**' (v. 58). This second denial he made emphatic 'with an oath.' Having twice declared that he is not a disciple, that he does not even know Jesus, Peter will surely be left alone in the future! He was just beginning to think so.

A whole hour had passed and no one had looked at him with suspicion. Again he breathed freely, mixed with the others, joined in the conversation. Those who are standing by (see Matt., Mark) came to him and said, 'Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee.' 'Thou art a Galilean.' There can be no doubt on this point, 'another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him: for he is a Galilean' (v. 59). *Further proof still said one*—a kinsman of Malchus, whose ear Peter cut off, 'Did not I see thee in the garden with Him?' (John v. 26). This charge was the most overwhelming of all that had been made against Peter. The evidence against him seemed unanswerable. A Galilean—speech proved it—seen in the garden—using his sword. Awful danger to him if they believe these things—Peter again denied, (3) '**I know not what thou sayest**'—**began to curse and swear, 'I know not the Man.'**

Peter had now reached the lowest dĕpth of his degradation. His fall had been sudden, yet it had grades, each making the sin more heinous. (1) **Unfaithfulness,** (2) **followed afar off,** (3) **denied simply,** (4) **denied with an oath,** (5) **denied with cursing and swearing.** How low the man has fallen—how he has sinned who vowed to follow his Lord to prison and to death!

II. **The Cause of Peter's Sin.**—Peter's sin was due to more causes than one. The most marked were

1. *His confidence in himself.*—He was sure that he loved Christ—loved Him so much that no power on earth could change him. His name—Peter, the name given by Jesus—meant a rock, unchangeable, strong. He

felt in the prospect of the trials that were coming on Jesus that he would prove to be worthy of this name. Jesus may have perfect confidence in him.

2. *Presumption and pride.*—On account of his confidence in himself he neglected watching and praying, and threw himself in the way of temptation and danger.

3. *Want of faith in Jesus.*—If he had had perfect confidence in Jesus he would have shown more humility and less confidence in himself. Pride, self-confidence, and boasting of having more love than others, are all indications of imperfect faith in Christ. Peter's faith was still weak,—not strong enough to endure temptation; his love was still tinged with selfishness,—not pure enough to enable him to go to prison and to death for his Lord and Master.

III. **Peter's Penitence for his Sin** (vv. 60-62).—When Peter denied Jesus for the third time, two things happened which showed him how much he had sinned, and brought conviction to his soul. (1) The vehemence and strong language with which he was denying Jesus must have silenced the conversation that was carried on by the servants. The noise in the court was hushed while they listened to Peter's denial of his Lord. (2) Another sound broke the silence. It was distinctly heard. It made Peter cease to curse and swear. 'While he yet spake, the cock crew.'

What memories that shrill sound awakened in the soul of Peter! Was it true, after all, that he had been so base as to deny his Lord? Was his guilt greater than that of the other disciples, who only forsook the Lord, while he had denied Him? Was it much less than that of Judas, who betrayed Him? What would Jesus think of the proud, boasting Peter now? Peter's thoughts were soon answered. At the moment Jesus was either led through the court from one room to another, or the room in which He was detained was in view of the court where Peter was, '**and the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.**' What did that look convey? No anger, no desire for revenge, no consciousness of superior knowledge; but sorrow, compassion, pity, love, a promise of forgiveness.

Then all things Jesus had said—the warnings, the exhortations to watch and pray, the announcement that Jesus had prayed for him, that his faith fail not—came to his remembrance, and he 'went out and wept bitterly.'

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. *Do not be ashamed to confess Jesus before men.* If we are ashamed to pray before others—to own that we are religious—have taken Jesus as our Master and Saviour—ashamed to do what we know to be right, to speak the truth, lest others should laugh at us, we are guilty of Peter's sin; we deny Jesus.

2. *Learn how a small beginning in wrong-doing leads necessarily on to worse sins.* Peter's case a good illustration of this.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

This lesson should easily be made interesting to the youngest children. In the case of a lord and his servant, a master and his scholar, or a parent and his child, should the servant be ashamed of his lord? What would we think of a child if he denied he ever knew father or mother? Illustrate in this way Peter's sin, and show how we may fall into it. Show how to avoid it.

XXXIII.—JESUS AND PILATE

Matt. xxvii. 1, 2, 11-26; Mark xv. 1-15; Luke xxiii. 1-25; John xviii. 28–xix. 16

Introduction.—The Sanhedrin had tried and condemned Jesus. No real evidence was produced against Him; but He had acknowledged before them that He is 'the Christ, the Son of God.' They should have inquired whether His claim could be established or not; instead, they pronounced it to be blasphemy, and declared Jesus to be guilty of death. But the power of the Sanhedrin was limited; it could try and condemn Jesus, but it could not put Him to death without the consent of the Roman governor. The chief priests and scribes knew that Pilate, who was the governor at that time, would not give his consent to the death of any one if he were charged with blasphemy only. He was a heathen, looked with contempt on the Jews, and avoided taking any part in their religious disputes. It would be necessary then for them to make such accusations against Jesus as would satisfy Pilate,—that Jesus was a danger to the Roman authority, and as such should be destroyed. To convey the impression that Jesus was dangerous, they 'bound Him, and led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor' (Matt.)

I. **Jesus is falsely accused before Pilate** (read Luke xxiii. 1-25).—In delivering up Jesus the Sanhedrin hoped to get authority from Pilate to put Him to death, on account of their own trial and verdict. He may have accepted their judgment on other occasions; he refused to do so on this. Hence his question, 'What accusation bring ye against this Man?' (John xviii. 29). They tried to evade the question. No real accusation. To gain their point they made a false accusation; they said, 'We have found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King' (v. 2). This was utterly false. Jesus never had attempted to pervert the people; He had paid tribute to Cæsar, and He called Himself 'Christ a King' in a different sense from that in which the accusers wished the governor to understand. Pilate required to take up this political charge.

II. **Jesus examined by Pilate** (John xviii. 33-37).—Pilate called Jesus unto the judgment hall, and asked Him, 'Art Thou the King of the Jews?' Any direct answer which Jesus could give to that question would be misunderstood. He had kept silence while the chief priests and elders accused Him (Matt. xxvii. 12, 13). He had given no answer to the governor when he said, 'Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee?' and 'the governor marvelled greatly.' But when He was examined by Pilate in the judgment hall regarding *His Messiahship*, He felt it His duty to speak. His accusers said, He sets forth 'that He Himself is Christ a King.' Was this true? In one sense not. He never made any claim to be a king in opposition to the Roman government: '**My kingdom is not of this world**,' He said. Yet He claimed to be a King. As *the Christ*, the *promised Messiah*, the *Son of David*, *He is the King of Israel*. He has a kingdom that would be set up in the hearts of men, and draw to Him, as

subjects, all who loved the truth. Pilate looked at the weary, defenceless prisoner before him, and in wonder asked, 'Art Thou then a King? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King' (John xviii. 37). Pilate could not understand it. He found Him innocent of the charge brought against Him by the Jews, and he said, 'I find no fault in this Man' (Luke xxiii. 4). What a disappointment this finding was to the chief priests and scribes! Pilate, convinced that Jesus was innocent, did not wish to condemn Him to death as the Jews desired, yet he was afraid to offend them by refusing. When he heard Jesus was connected with Galilee he resolved to send Him to Herod, who was at the time in Jerusalem, and who had jurisdiction over that province.

III. **Pilate sent Jesus to Herod** (Luke xxiii. 7-12).—This incident in the trial of Jesus is related in Luke's gospel only. It is very interesting and important, as it gives an additional proof of the innocence of Jesus. Herod was pleased with the courtesy of Pilate; they had been on unfriendly terms before, but this act restored their friendship. He was pleased also at the opportunity of seeing Jesus. He had long desired this. When he first heard of Him working miracles, he was afraid that He was John the Baptist whom he had murdered, who had risen from the dead. Such fears all gone. Jesus was there before him—a prisoner, accused of conspiracy, in his power. What will he do with Him? 'He hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.' Like the other Jews, a lover of signs. He hoped to hear Him speak—say something in defence of Himself when the chief priests and scribes 'vehemently accused Him.' But no; He neither answered Herod's questions nor replied to His accusers. His silence amazed them all. Then 'Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate' (v. 11).

IV. **Pilate tried to save Jesus from Death** (vv. 13-22).—(*a*) **Pilate hoped to get rid of the responsibility of deciding the case of Jesus by sending Him to Herod.** He was disappointed; Herod sent Him back with the opinion, 'Nothing worthy of death is done by Him.' That agreed with the opinion Pilate himself had formed (vv. 13-16). The sending back of Jesus was an important moment in Pilate's history. It was the great crisis in his life. He believed Jesus to be innocent of the charges brought against Him, and he ought to have liberated Him. Conscience pointed out this course, but he was afraid to offend the Jews. He began to tamper with strict justice. With the hope of saving the life of Jesus, he was willing to inflict upon Him undeserved punishment. As an innocent man He ought to be released, but to gratify the Jews and appease their anger against Him, he proposed to scourge Him and let Him go. This proposal was rejected. Jesus must be put to death; nothing less would satisfy the mob. (*b*) **Pilate made another effort to save Jesus from death.** It was the custom at the Passover to release a prisoner. At that time there was in prison a notorious man—Barabbas—who had caused an insurrection in the city, and was a murderer and a robber. If the chief priests and scribes were so opposed to *seditious persons* and *disturbers of the peace of the nation*, they could not desire the release of Barabbas. Pilate gave them the choice, with the desire that they would choose Jesus. He offered to release Jesus, King of the Jews, or Barabbas. He hoped the voice of the people would decide for the innocent

and the just, but the popular cry was, 'Not this man, but Barabbas.' How sad! a murderer, a robber, chosen instead of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled. (*c*) **Pilate made one effort more.** By the choice of the people, Jesus was condemned to the death that Barabbas ought to have died; the innocent must take the place of the guilty—Jesus must be crucified. Was it pity on Pilate's part—a faint hope that he might yet turn the popular feeling in favour of Jesus—that made him scourge Him, and allowed the soldiers to put the crown of thorns on His head, to clothe Him with a purple robe, and go through a mock service of obeisance? It looks like it. He brought Him again before His accusers, after He was scourged, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and said, 'Behold the Man' (John xix. 1-15). Would they now pity their Messiah? would they pity the 'Man' suffering as He did? The sight of mock royalty enraged them more than ever, and they cried out, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.' Pilate has tried to save Jesus; will he give up the attempt?

V. **Pilate delivered Jesus to them to be crucified** (vv. 23-25).—By departing from strict justice Pilate lost his influence with the people and the priests. They knew that by persistence they would get all they wished —the governor's authority to put Jesus to death. After further attempts of Pilate to release Him, the Jews overcome all opposition by a threat, 'If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar' (John xix. 12). Against his own sense of justice, in the face of the warning sent from his wife (Matt. xxvii. 19), through fear of the Jews rising in rebellion, and the unfavourable report that might be sent to Rome if he did not condemn Jesus, he delivered Jesus to them to be crucified.

PRACTICAL LESSON

The patience and endurance of Jesus. In all these trials remember His silence. He endured the contradiction of sinners. All this endurance was for us; the patience is for our example.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Try to give the children a connected account of the Saviour's appearance before Pilate as set forth in the lesson. Note specially the hatred of the Jews to Jesus in urging Pilate to put Him to death, the sin of Pilate in condemning unjustly, and the love of Jesus in enduring all these sufferings for us.

XXXIV.—JESUS ON HIS WAY TO CALVARY, AND EARLIER HOURS ON THE CROSS

Matt. xxvii. 27-44; Mark xv. 16-32; Luke xxiii. 26-43; John xix. 17-27

Revision.—The last lesson set forth the treatment Jesus received from Pilate. Having inflicted such injustice upon Him, we would expect Pilate to take care that no further insult should be done to Jesus. Surely he will save Him from unnecessary pain! Instead, he left Him in the hands of brutal soldiers, who continued the mockery begun during the trial. At first only those in charge took part in it, but after He was delivered to be crucified, the soldiers led Him into the common hall, or governor's house, and gathered unto Him the whole band (Matt. xxvii. 27-30). All joined in mocking and insulting Jesus. While He waited there till preparations were made for His crucifixion, they added cruelty to their mockery. 'They spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head'; then they took off the purple robe, 'and put on His own raiment, and led Him away to crucify Him.' We are not told that they removed the crown of thorns—that was left to add to His sufferings. On the cross He was to be exhibited as the *King of the Jews*.

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **Jesus on His way to Calvary** (Luke xxiii. 26-32).—Calvary was the place of public execution. It lay outside the walls of Jerusalem. It is called by the other Evangelists Golgotha—the place of a skull. This name was probably given to the place from the skull-like shape of the hill or eminence, and not because there were heaped up at the spot the skulls of criminals who had died there. The Jews did not allow the bodies or bones of criminals to remain unburied. To this place Jesus 'went out, bearing the cross for Himself.' This was a part of the cruelty and degradation which had to be endured by those who were condemned to be crucified. He went out in the company of two thieves. What a contrast between Jesus entering Jerusalem in triumphal procession a few days before, and His being led out of the city as a criminal, bearing His cross! Two things happened on the way.

1. **Owing to weakness Jesus was unable to carry His cross to the place of execution.** He went out bearing it, but the soldiers noticed His failing strength, and perhaps feared that He might die before Calvary was reached. Remember all that He had suffered, and we will not be surprised at His weakness. He had been 'troubled in spirit'; betrayed by Judas; had endured the agony of Gethsemane; had undergone trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate; had been mocked, buffeted, scourged. No wonder He was so worn out and faint that He could not bear the load of the cross! In these circumstances, the soldiers exercised the power they possessed and made another bear His cross. At the moment 'Simon, a Cyrenian,' who was coming out of the country, appeared on the scene. Did Simon seem interested? Did he express pity for the poor Sufferer? Perhaps so; for they compelled him to bear the cross after Jesus. What an honour was conferred on Simon! The crowd

probably jeered him at being associated with a criminal; but he helped Jesus in the hour of trial, and he received his reward. His name and the names of his sons are spoken of as well known to the first readers of the Gospel (Mark xv. 21). This indicates that all became believers in Jesus, and were honoured by the Church.

2. **Crowds followed the three who were led to execution. Many women in the crowd pitied Jesus.** They were not disciples, but were moved with compassion when they saw Him bowing under the weight of the cross. They 'bewailed and lamented Him.' Probably this took place when Simon was being brought forward. This stoppage in the procession gave Jesus the opportunity of addressing them. 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me,' He said, 'but weep for yourselves, and for your children.' He then depicted the terrible sufferings that were in store for the city which had rejected Him, and said, 'If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?' If the innocent Jesus is thus treated, what shall be the punishment of those who are ripe for judgment on account of their own guilt and sin? After these words were spoken they came to 'the place which is called Calvary; **there they crucified Him**' (Luke xxiii. 33).

II. **Jesus on the Cross.**—The shame and pain of death by crucifixion should have been enough to have satisfied the brutal nature of the soldiers, and the enmity and thirst for revenge of the chief priests and scribes and elders. An innocent man put to the most cruel death should have awakened pity in the most hardened hearts. But no. Notice—(1) **All parties joined in insulting Jesus, and adding to His suffering when He hung upon the cross.** (*a*) *The soldiers did the work of nailing His hands and feet to the cross without any sympathy.* This done, they set up the cross, and in the presence of the Sufferer began to divide His garments among them. For one part—the coat without seam, woven from the top throughout—they cast lots (John xix. 23, 24). He had refused at first to take the draught of vinegar to stupefy and make Him less sensible to pain; yet the soldiers mocked Him by continuing to offer this, and taunting Him, 'If Thou be King of the Jews, save Thyself.' (*b*) *Pilate insulted Him by causing Him to be executed along with two malefactors*—causing His cross to be in the centre—and putting the title over His cross, '*This is the King of the Jews.*' Pilate knew He was innocent of crime—He had no sympathy with malefactors—He did not claim to be King of the Jews in the sense the title on the cross meant—yet he increased the sufferings of Jesus by adding these insults to His unjust condemnation. (*c*) *The chief priests and rulers and many of the people disowned Him*—'reviled Him'—'railed on Him, wagging their heads'—and 'derided Him.' The priests disowned Him by trying to get Pilate to change the title (John xix. 21, 22). They and others reviled and derided and railed on Him by reminding Him of His helplessness on the cross. 'Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself; and if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. . . . He saved others; Himself He cannot save' (Matt. xxvii. 40-43). Could language more blasphemous be used? The revilers professed to be willing to believe on Jesus if He would only give them convincing evidence. Could He who hung on the cross destroy the temple? Could He be the Son of God? Could He be the Saviour of others? Could He be the Christ

—the Chosen of God? Impossible! Let Him prove it by coming down from the cross. (*d*) *The malefactors, who 'were crucified with Him, reviled Him.'* One of them said, 'If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us.' Jesus—'the Holy One and the Just'—was suffering on the cross to save men from sin and death, and His sufferings were aggravated by enduring 'such contradiction of sinners against Himself' (Heb. xii. 2, 3).

Notice—(2) **The forgiving, patient, and loving spirit which Jesus manifested while undergoing such cruel treatment.**

(*a*) When they nailed His hands and feet to the cross, and set it up between the two thieves and murderers, *He prayed, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'* Forgive the soldiers, the unjust Pilate, the priests, rulers, and people who had rejected Him. Forgive all who had taken any part in His crucifixion. Thus Jesus prayed for His murderers. (*b*) *He endured patiently the 'contradiction of sinners against Himself.'* He heard them doubt His power to save because He would not come down from the cross. They reminded Him of what He could do and had done, and taunted Him to do the same now. He endured their taunts, and patiently endured the cross with all its shame. (*c*) *He showed His love for the penitent sinner.* One of the malefactors recognised the Messiahship of Jesus when on the cross. His innocence, patience, forgiving spirit, impressed the man, and he prayed Jesus, after acknowledging the justice of his own sentence, 'Remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.' This was enough. Penitence, faith, and hope were all expressed in this prayer, and the Saviour answered, 'To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise' (Luke xxiii. 39-43). Here was a proof that Jesus could still *save others*; but His enemies could not understand it. (*d*) *The love of Jesus is further shown by His care for His mother* (John xix. 25-27). Nothing can be more touching than these words. Jesus was bearing on His heart the sins and sufferings of the human race. He was disowned and deserted by all, save the thief who had acknowledged Him, and the small group of four women and one man who had come near the cross. Though enduring so much, He could think of His mother. He must provide for her a home. So He commended her to John as a mother and John to her as a son. The sacredness of the love of child to parent and parent to child is shown by the love of Jesus for His sorrowing mother, when He was enduring the death of the cross.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

The Saviour here teaches—(1) Forgiveness of our enemies. (2) His readiness to forgive the penitent sinner. (3) The sacredness of filial love.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Use the details of the lesson in such a way as to make them illustrations of the Practical Lessons. Give special importance to (3), which teaches that love to parents and making provision for them ought to be the first duty of a son (1 Tim. v. 8).

XXXV.—JESUS' LATER HOURS ON THE CROSS, DEATH, AND BURIAL

Matt. xxvii. 45-66; Mark xv. 33-47; Luke xxiii. 44-56; John xix. 28-42

Revision.—In last lesson we followed Jesus on His way to Calvary, where He was crucified. Death by crucifixion is slow and lingering, and implies great suffering. The sufferings endured by Jesus were increased by the treatment He received from the soldiers, the priests, and the people. But He bore all His sufferings with patience. 'When He was reviled, He reviled not again.' By three utterances He showed that amid all His sufferings He was forgetful of Himself, and thinking of others. He prayed for His enemies, **'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'** (Luke xxiii. 34). When one of the malefactors acknowledged Him as Messiah, and prayed to be remembered by Him in His kingdom, He answered, **'To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise'** (Luke xxiii. 43). When He saw His mother standing by, His love gave her another son. Referring to the disciple who was with her, He said, **'Woman, behold thy son!'** and to him He said, **'Behold thy mother!'** (John xix. 26, 27). In the earlier hours on the cross, Jesus prayed and provided for others while He suffered. His mind and spirit were undisturbed. His sufferings seemed to be only such as the cruel hatred of wicked men could inflict. About the sixth hour a great change took place on Calvary. After this the words of Jesus referred to Himself and His work.

Sketch of Lesson.—Read Matt. xxvii. 45-66.

I. **The Sufferings of Jesus from the sixth till the ninth Hour** (vv 45-49).

1. **Jesus suffered in darkness.**—'From the sixth hour there was darkness.' The sixth hour was the hour of noon, when the sun should have shone brightly; yet a mysterious darkness covered the whole land. This darkness was not due to an eclipse of the sun, as it was full moon at the time. An eclipse can only take place at new moon. The darkness lasted from noon till nearly three o'clock. If the enemies of Jesus had not been blinded by ignorance and hatred, they would have seen in this a proof that Jesus was the 'Holy One and the Just.' It was a sign to them that they were murdering the Lord of Nature. Nature mourned at the sight, and the sun would not shine on those who were putting out the 'Light of the world' by putting to death the Prince of Life.

2. **During His sufferings Jesus expressed His thoughts and feelings by words.**—(1) 'About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, . . . **My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?**' (v. 46). This shows that the darkness which hung around the cross was a symbol of some darkness which cast its shadow over the soul of Jesus, and concealed from Him His Father's face. The darkness indicated the nature of the conflict Jesus was engaged in on the cross. He was fighting against the powers of darkness and sin; and in the contest His soul and spirit had to pass through the dark 'valley of the shadow of death.' How much Jesus

suffered in this contest we can never know. How terrible it must have been for Him to feel as if His Father had forsaken Him! How dense must have been the darkness, how keen the anguish of soul which made Him cry out, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' These mysterious words can only be explained by remembering that Jesus 'bare our sins in His body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness' (1 Pet. ii. 24). But though Jesus suffered such anguish and passed through a moment of darkness, He maintained His trust in God, and was able to say, '*My* God.' This faith gained Him the victory, as it expressed the consciousness of a union with God which nothing could destroy. (2) The next word used by Jesus indicated that He felt the intensity of His physical sufferings. The mental and spiritual agony was past, but He was still enduring the torments of crucifixion, one of the most unbearable of which was thirst. Jesus said, '**I thirst**' (John xix. 28). John says that Jesus uttered this cry in order that Scripture might be fulfilled (Ps. lxix. 21). But the thirst of Jesus was real. It showed that on the cross He endured all the bodily sufferings connected with this shameful and painful death. At the beginning of the crucifixion He refused to drink the mixture of vinegar and gall which was offered Him. That was intended to stupefy the sufferer, and make him less sensible to pain; and Jesus would not take it. He needed to enter on the conflict with a clear mind, a firm will, and a spirit strong in the Lord. But when the conflict was ended He sought relief from the torment of thirst, and took the vinegar which one of them gave Him to drink (Matt. xxvii. 48). (3) The next expression uttered by Jesus was, '**It is finished**' (John xix. 30). He said this immediately after He received the vinegar. 'It is accomplished.' *What* is accomplished? All that Jesus came to do and endure. The revelation of the Father—the manifestation of God's love—the reconciliation of man to God—the opening up of a 'living way' of access into the presence of the Father—the self-sacrifice—the suffering—the enduring of the cross—all things that Jesus set before Himself to do when He came into the world, have been 'accomplished.' Remember the paraphrase—

> 'Tis finished,—the Messiah dies
> For sins, but not His own;
> The great redemption is complete,
> And Satan's power o'erthrown.'

II. **The Death of Jesus, and the Events which accompanied it** (Matt. xxvii. 50-56).—The three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, say that after Jesus had cried with a loud voice He 'gave up the ghost.' St. Luke alone tells us what this last cry was, '**Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit**' (Luke xxiii. 46). These words show that the darkness which troubled the soul of Jesus when He cried 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' had entirely passed away. In 'yielding up' His spirit Jesus showed that though nature required Him to die, yet the act was His own, and was prompted by love and obedience to the will of the Father (John x. 18).

The events which accompanied the death of Jesus show its significance. (1) '**The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.**' This veil separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Only the high priest was permitted to pass behind this veil. Henceforth through the death of Jesus all believers have access into the presence of the

God. When He died the veil was rent to indicate that Jesus is the way to the Father. (2) **There was an earthquake,** graves were opened, and many of the saints came out of their graves 'after His resurrection.' These events indicated that Jesus had gained the victory over death and the grave. He is the Resurrection and the Life. (3) **A great spiritual impression** was produced on the centurion and those watching with him. The things which happened during the six hours Jesus hung on the cross led the centurion and the Roman soldiers to feel that the 'Crucified One' was no ordinary man, and they declared their faith; 'Truly this was the Son of God.'

III. **The Burial of Jesus** (Matt. xxvii. 57-66; John xix. 38-42).—The Jews were anxious that the bodies of the three who were crucified should be taken down from the cross before the Sabbath began. To hasten on death, permission was given to break the legs of the sufferers. This was a common practice. When the soldiers came to Jesus, they found Him already dead. They did not break His legs, but pierced His side, from which flowed forth blood and water. Here prophecy was fulfilled (John xix. 31-37). The soldiers were satisfied from this that Jesus was dead. Who will bury Him? The disciples have all deserted Him. There are women looking on from afar who would take the body if they knew how to get Him. How their hearts are grieved that they have no one to act for them! Behold, who goes to Pilate? Joseph of Arimathæa—a disciple of Jesus, but secretly—and Nicodemus, the ruler who came to Jesus by night. These two men, who had secretly followed Jesus, came forth to bury Him when His professed disciples deserted Him. They now made amends for having been ashamed of Jesus before men, and acknowledged and honoured Him after He had died the death of a malefactor.

PRACTICAL LESSON

The whole subject has one thought running through it—*the immeasurable love of Jesus Christ for men.* His sufferings were inconceivable—His self-sacrifice unequalled in the world's history—His humiliation unparalleled—yet all were endured through His love for sinners.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It is not desirable to direct the attention of children to the mysterious elements which are present in the death of Jesus on the cross. It is enough to show the greatness of His sufferings; these were endured for us, and are a proof of the greatness of His love for us. Direct attention to Joseph and Nicodemus coming forward at this time. How sorry they must have been that they had not confessed faith in Jesus earlier! Be not ashamed to own Him before men.

XXXVI.—RESURRECTION OF JESUS, AND HIS APPEARANCE TO MINISTERING WOMEN

Matt. xxviii. 1-10; Mark xvi. 1-8; Luke xxiv. 1-11; John xx. 1-18

Introduction.—While Jesus was with the disciples, He taught them that He would rise again from the dead. In His farewell discourse He said, regarding His dying and rising again, 'A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father' (John xvi. 16). On other occasions He stated the fact so clearly that no one could doubt His meaning. As soon as He began to make known to them that He must suffer and die at Jerusalem, He began also to intimate that He would rise again on the third day (Matt. xvi. 21; Mark viii. 31; ix. 31). Notwithstanding these direct intimations, the disciples did not understand what Jesus meant. When He died, none of them expected that He would rise again from the dead. They failed to recall the words which He had spoken on the subject. They thought that death had taken Him from them for ever. Henceforth their duty would be to cherish His memory. At present they could show their affection for Him by paying respect to His dead body. That none of the disciples or followers of Jesus expected His resurrection, is shown by their grief at His death, and the unbelief of some when they first heard of it (Mark xvi. 10, 11), and by the preparations which were made by the ministering women for anointing His body (Mark xvi. 1; Luke xxiv. 1).

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **The Visit to the Sepulchre** (read John xx. 1-18; Luke xxiv. 1-8).—When the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, and conveyed by Joseph of Arimathæa to the new sepulchre which he had prepared in a garden, 'the women also which came from Galilee followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how the body was laid' (Luke xxiii. 55). After the others departed, two tarried—'Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre' (Matt. xxvii. 61). As soon as the Sabbath was past, they began to prepare spices: not satisfied with what Nicodemus had done, they prepared more, and intended to anoint the body. On the first day of the week—early—they set out to do this work of love. On the way they wondered how they would be able to remove the great stone that closed the door of the sepulchre (Mark xvi. 3). When they came near, they found the stone rolled away. When they entered in, they 'found not the body of the Lord Jesus' (Luke xxiv. 3). Instead of being glad, they were filled with fear. The empty tomb should have recalled the words Jesus spoke about rising again. But—never thought He must have risen, as He said—concluded some one had stolen away the body.

Mary Magdalene left the other women, 'much perplexed thereabout,' and carried the news to Peter and John. With grief she exclaimed, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him' (John xx. 2). On receiving this information Peter and John ran to see for themselves. When Peter came, he entered into the sepulchre; the other disciple followed him. The tomb did not contain the body of Jesus,

but it contained things which should have helped them to believe that Jesus had risen. The linen clothes lay there, the napkin that had been round the head was there too, 'but wrapped together in a place by itself.' Who had left these things? If any one had stolen the body, they would have taken the clothes also. They would not have taken the trouble to wrap up the napkin. It looked as if Jesus had risen. But 'as yet they knew not the Scriptures, that He must rise again from the dead,' so they went home believing only what Mary had said—'They have taken away the Lord' (John xx. 2-10).

II. **The Visions of the Angels** (Mark xvi. 5-7 ; John xx. 11, 12).—The names of the women who watched the sufferings of Jesus on the cross—His burial—and who went out to visit the sepulchre on the morning of the first day, are Mary Magdalene, the other Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome the mother of John, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Luke viii. 3). Besides these, Luke says, there were others. According to Luke's gospel, these ministering women, while they were at the sepulchre, saw a vision of two men who stood by them in 'shining garments.' This must have happened when Mary Magdalene was absent informing Peter and John that the tomb was empty. The angels told the women that Jesus had risen, reproved them for seeking the living among the dead, and reminded them of the words Jesus had spoken unto them in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and *the third day rise again*' (Luke xxiv. 4-7). They also commanded them to go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus is risen (Matt. xxviii. 7 ; Mark xvi. 7).

Before Mary Magdalene returned to the sepulchre along with Peter and John, this had taken place, and the other women had left in obedience to the command of the angels. They went out quickly, before she could return (Mark xvi. 8; Matt. xxviii. 8). Fear partly, and joy partly, hurried them away. Mary Magdalene missed this vision by going to inform Peter and John. But she did not suffer for her zeal in seeking help to recover the body of the Lord. She came back to the sepulchre after Peter and John. She remained there after they had gone home. Her grief expressed itself in tears. As she wept she looked down into the empty tomb. Something strange attracted her attention. The tomb was not empty. She saw there two 'angels in white.' What were they doing? 'Sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain' (John xx. 12). How strange! Angels watching the place where Jesus had lain! Surely this vision will lead Mary on to a higher faith, and help her to believe in a risen Lord! It did not. Mary still wept as she looked into the tomb. When asked why she wept, her answer showed that one thought filled her mind—'They have taken away *my Lord*, and *I* know not where they have laid Him' (John xx. 13). Her grief has deepened, her love has increased. It is *my Lord* who is taken away; and it is *I* who seek to find Him. She cannot look long on the empty tomb; the sight adds to her sorrow. 'She turned herself back,' and behold—

III. **The Appearance of Jesus** (John xx. 14-18 ; Mark xvi. 9).—Jesus stood before Mary as she wept. He inquired the cause of her great sorrow, and asked, 'Whom seekest thou?' So little hope had she of the resurrection of

Jesus, or of ever seeing Him again alive, she mistook him for the gardener. Here, she thought, was her opportunity; this man must know what has happened in his garden. Supposing that he knows, by finding her at the tomb, whom she is seeking, she says at once, 'Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away' (John xx. 15). [No narrative could be more true to nature than that. Mary, absorbed with one thought, overwhelmed with a great grief, commits her confidence to one whom she thinks a stranger, and fails to recognise the presence of her Lord.] Jesus could not be displeased with such love and zeal. Her knowledge and faith were imperfect. She would have been satisfied with the body of the dead Christ. Love such as hers prepared her for a greater revelation.

Then He appeared to her as the risen, living Saviour. The calling her by name—Mary—was enough to lead her to recognise Jesus, and she acknowledged Him as 'My dear Master.' On this occasion Jesus would not allow her to touch Him, and gave as a reason, 'I am not yet ascended to My Father' (John xx. 17). Mary attached too much importance to the body of Jesus. Her grief was that it had been removed without its being discovered, and the removal would mean great loss to her. Jesus taught her that faith, love, adoration, and service must not depend on His bodily presence. The message He gave her to His brethren taught them to love and serve Him though they could not see Him or touch Him. Say unto them, 'I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God' (John xx. 17).

This was **the first appearance** of Jesus after His resurrection. From Matthew (xxviii. 9) we learn that about the same time He appeared to the other Mary (and the others mentioned by Luke who made up the party who visited the sepulchre) as she and they were obeying the command of the angels, to go and tell the disciples. They were going into the city, and on the way He met them, saying, 'All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped Him.' These were allowed a privilege *denied* to Mary Magdalene. Mary's greater faith enabled her to believe without touching: the others required to see and feel before they could believe.

PRACTICAL LESSON

The revelation of the resurrection, like other revelations, was given first to those who were best prepared to receive it. The ministering women never deserted Jesus. They watched all His sufferings, took part in His burial, and prepared to honour Him by anointing His body. To them He first revealed Himself as the risen Lord. The same is true still. The pure in heart see God.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Direct attention to the devotion of the women who followed Jesus from Galilee. How true they were to Him! Condemnation by Sanhedrin—Pilate—the Crucifixion did not shake their faith in Him, or weaken their love. Show how they watched to help and serve Him. How they were rewarded. The first to know that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that He had conquered sin through dying for it.

XXXVII.—JESUS' APPEARANCE ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS

Luke xxiv. 13-33

Introduction.—Last lesson dealt with the appearance of Jesus to the ministering women. They were sent to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen; but 'their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.' They had to admit that the sepulchre was empty—some of them had seen it; but they wanted more evidence than the testimony of women to convince them of the resurrection of Jesus. The sadness and disappointment and doubt which troubled the minds of the disciples because of this want of faith in a suffering Christ and risen Lord are illustrated in this lesson.

Sketch of Lesson.—On the afternoon of the same day on which the risen Saviour appeared to Mary and the other women, two disciples left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus. These disciples did not belong to 'the eleven,' but they were so intimate with them, they knew all that had happened that morning. Why then were they leaving? Why not wait to see whether the report of the women may prove true? Evidently their faith was beginning to fail. The whole affair was so mysterious they could not understand it. It occupied their thoughts and formed the subject of conversation on the way. They were so earnest about the matter and so grieved, they continued to talk, though one whom they did not know had come up and went with them. This was Jesus; 'but their eyes were holden that they should not know Him.' In their present state of mind they were not able to receive the truth that Jesus had risen. They required to be instructed regarding the nature of the Messiah's work before they could understand that *suffering was the way to glory, and death to life.* Jesus therefore entered into conversation with them, and asked

I. **What was the subject of such earnest Conversation? what was the cause of their Sadness?** (vv. 17-24)—The question surprised them. What were all men talking about then? One of them, named Cleopas, said, '*Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are came to pass in these days?*' Jesus said, 'What things?' Jesus put these questions for the purpose of leading them to state to Him all their troubles and doubts. This they did; His interest in them won their confidence, and they told Him all. They were sad because of what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth. He was indeed a prophet before God and the people. His words and deeds proved that. But they had expected more. They believed Him to be the Messiah—'We trusted that it should have been He which should have redeemed Israel.' They hoped He would have delivered the nation from Roman bondage. These hopes were all crushed. The chief priests and rulers were opposed to Him, and 'delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him.' No wonder they were sad! They had lost a Master, the nation had lost a prophet, and One who might 'have redeemed Israel.' They were also perplexed and in doubt. *What credence should they give to a report about Jesus having risen?* This 'is the third day since these things were done.' Before they left, certain women of their

company had been at the sepulchre; they found it empty, and saw 'angels which said that He was alive.' It was certain the tomb was empty, as others had gone after the women, but they did not see Jesus. Will this stranger wonder now why sorrow has filled their hearts? Will He leave them to their own sad thoughts, or will He join them in trying to explain the mystery?

II. **Jesus reproved, instructed, and consoled the two Disciples** (vv. 25-29).—By a single word He could have manifested Himself to them and removed all their doubts and sorrows. He adopted another plan. He helped their faith by explaining to them the Scriptures. He said, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?' They had been fools in the sense that they were wanting in understanding. They had not laid hold of the real nature of the Messiah's work. They had been 'slow of heart' to believe **all** that the prophets had revealed concerning Christ. They had only believed the parts which set forth the grandeur and glory of His kingdom; but had rejected what was spoken regarding the **sufferings of Messiah.** Ignorance and unbelief were the cause of their sadness and doubts. If they had known the Scriptures, they would have known that it was only through suffering that Christ could attain the glory and perfection which fit Him to be the Captain of our salvation. This truth He proved to be taught by Moses and all the Prophets. Types in Moses' writings such as the paschal lamb, the brazen serpent, pointed to a suffering Christ (1 Cor. v. 7; John iii. 14). Many passages in Psalms and the Prophets set forth that Messiah must suffer and die before He enters into the glory which is to be revealed (Ps. xvi., xxii., lv., lxix.; Isa. liii.; Zech. xii. 10). The Jews ignored this side of Christ's work; so did the disciples; hence their perplexity and doubts when Jesus was taken and crucified. The two disciples had never read the Scriptures in that light before. It was a revelation to them. According to the Scriptures Jesus must after all be the Christ. His having suffered is a proof of it; the glory is to follow. Their faith revived. New hopes, new joys, and a glowing love filled their souls as they listened to the strange Teacher's words. Who can He be? Can they not yet recognise Him? No. They reached the village, 'And He made as though He would have gone further. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us.'

III. **Jesus revealed Himself to the two Disciples** (vv. 30, 31).—The instruction which Jesus had given to them made them value His company, though they did not know who He was. How glad they were they had met Him! How easily He had explained all the mysteries which perplexed them! They would still continue to declare their faith in the crucified Jesus. He was still the Christ. What a change on their views and feelings and hopes this strange Teacher had produced! They longed to learn more from Him—to consult Him about the reports of the resurrection. So they pressed Him to stay with them. He consented, 'And He went to tarry with them.' They sat down to supper. Did He act like one who was a guest? At table He took the chief place. 'He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.' There was something in these acts that made them sensible of the presence of Jesus. Whether it was the words He used in blessing, or His manner in breaking and giving, the

Person of Jesus rose in their minds and stood before their eyes, which were now opened. They had seen the risen Christ. He had made Himself known to them 'in breaking of bread.' (The 'breaking of bread' on this occasion was a common meal; not the Sacrament, though it does indicate that believers do have a special manifestation of the Saviour's gracious presence and love in the bread broken in remembrance of Him.) What were their thoughts and feelings when they recognised Jesus? What joy that He was to stay with them for that night! How privileged they were to have the opportunity of getting full explanations regarding His future plans! But as soon as they knew Him, 'He vanished out of their sight.' The whole appearance was designed to reprove ignorance and unbelief, to enlighten and strengthen weak and failing faith, and to teach the disciples that Jesus is with them always, though they may not be able to see Him. If they believe that He is the Christ though He suffered and died; that He has risen again and entered into glory; that He can be with them though they do not see Him, then they are prepared for the work to which He called them. His personal presence is no longer needed; faith after this will take the place of sight.

IV. **The two Disciples returned to Jerusalem to proclaim the appearance of Jesus to them** (vv. 32-35).—They knew that many others were in the same state of mind as themselves when they left. Doubts, fears, disappointed hopes were experienced by the friends and disciples of Jesus. Knowing this, the two returned that same hour to announce their faith in Jesus as the Christ, who had risen from the dead and had appeared to them. Also to show how He had taught that the Scriptures set forth that Christ ought to have suffered these things. Unless He had suffered,—no redemption from sin, no salvation, no glory. What a glorious revelation! Yet it had been hid from them till Jesus appeared.

PRACTICAL LESSON

The importance of understanding the Scriptures.—They reveal Christ. They testify of Him. They set forth fully the person, character, and work of Christ. Had the two disciples known them as they should have done, they would have been saved from sadness and doubt, and have recognised Jesus sooner than they did.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Direct attention to the grief of the disciples at the loss of a Friend and Master, their doubts about how they should act, and their joy in finding One who could instruct and help them. Show that Jesus is always near to comfort the sorrowing; also that if we wish Him to 'abide with us' we must ask Him—even constrain Him.

XXXVIII.—JESUS' APPEARANCE TO THE APOSTLES

Luke xxiv. 36-43; John xx. 19-29

Introduction.—We naturally expected that Jesus would have shown Himself after His resurrection to the Apostles *first*. They had been most intimately associated with Him. Some of them had been privileged to see Him on the Mount of Transfiguration and heard the voice of the Father declare Him to be His 'beloved Son' (Matt. xvii. 1-6). Some had seen His agony in Gethsemane and saw Him pass through His mysterious sorrow. To all of them He had communicated spiritual truths which were concealed from the ordinary disciples. So we expected He would have appeared to them first when He rose from the dead. But no. Their desertion of Him when He was taken had deadened their hearts. The disappointment of their worldly hopes had blinded their minds. Their faith was terribly shaken. They had lost all confidence, and were afraid lest the Jews should persecute them as they had done Jesus. On the evening of the first day of the week they were assembled together. For fear of the Jews they had shut the doors. They were greatly perplexed. Rumours of Jesus having appeared to different persons were increasing. Mary Magdalene and the other women had seen Him. He had appeared to Simon. The two men from Emmaus had just returned and were relating His appearance to them and their converse with Him. While they spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said unto them, 'Peace be unto you.'

I. The Effect produced on the Apostles by the Appearance of Jesus (Luke xxiv. 36, 37).

1. Luke says, 'They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed they had seen a spirit' (v. 37). The manner of His entrance—appearing suddenly among them when the doors were shut—tended to make them afraid. If He had walked into the room, like an ordinary man, they could have understood it, but '*He stood in the midst of them.*' That could not be a human body? It had the appearance of Jesus, but it could not really be He? It must be a spirit. They were influenced by superstition rather than faith, hence partly arose their fears. But the chief cause of their fears was unbelief and hardness of heart (Mark xvi. 14). They ought by that time to have been prepared for Jesus coming into their midst as He did. He had informed them when He was alive that He would rise again. He had sent them a message through the angels and the ministering women that He had risen. He had appeared that day to four different parties on different occasions—to Mary Magdalene, to the other ministering women, to the Emmaus disciples, and to Simon. With His intimation and all that evidence they should have believed in the risen Lord. Yet many still doubted. Even when He appeared among them, when He stood before their eyes, when they heard His voice speaking the salutation, 'Peace be unto you,' they could hardly believe and were troubled. How great were their unbelief and hardness of heart!

2. The fears and doubts which they experienced at first passed away. In great love Jesus rebuked them for their want of faith (Mark xvi. 14). He then gave them evidence to convince them that He was the risen Christ.

And they were 'glad when they saw the Lord.' One can hardly imagine the greatness of their joy. Jesus had risen! He stood there before them. He gave them 'His peace.' Faith, hope, and love revived again in their hearts; they were filled with wonder; their joy seemed too great to be real, and almost hindered them from believing.

II. **Jesus removed the Fears and revived the Faith of the Apostles by giving them convincing Evidence of the Reality of His Appearance** (Luke xxiv. 38-43; John xx. 20).—He did this—1. *To the Apostles and those with them on this occasion.* He asked, Why are ye troubled? Why do thoughts arise in your hearts? (Luke). He was surprised that they did not recognise Him, and in great condescension He accommodated His manifestation to their weak faith. He offered them the evidence of their senses. He pointed to His hands and feet and wounded side. They could handle Him and see that He was no mere spirit, but the real living Jesus. Still further to help their faith He asked for meat, 'and did eat before them.' What wonderful condescension! To show Himself in their midst ought to have produced faith. The declaration 'It is I myself' ought to have been received and believed. But in the greatness of His love He condescended to show them the marks left by the Crucifixion. They could no longer doubt; they no longer feared. 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord' (John xx. 20).

2. *Jesus also condescended to accommodate His appearance to the doubts and stubbornness of Thomas* (John xx. 24-29). He was absent when Jesus made His first appearance to the Apostles. When he was informed of it he refused to believe. No evidence would convince him but that of his senses. He must both see and feel. He must examine minutely to make sure that the real Jesus has appeared. He said, 'Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.' This was a strong expression of doubt, and shows that Thomas was determined to have the resurrection of Jesus proved by the evidence of sight and touch before he would believe it. With wonderful condescension Jesus granted him the kind of evidence his condition of mind required to produce conviction. Eight days after the first appearance the Apostles were again assembled. Thomas was with them on this occasion, which shows that he was an honest doubter. He wanted to see if Jesus would again appear. As formerly, the doors were shut. 'Then came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.' Will He take any notice of Thomas? Will He leave him in doubt and unbelief, if he does not recognise Him in this manifestation? Or will He let him know that He has heard his doubting words, and condescend to strengthen his weak faith? He addressed Thomas specially. He offered him the kind of evidence he required: 'Reach hither thy finger. . . . Be not faithless, but believing' (v. 27). How gentle the rebuke! He might have severely reproved him for his lack of charity in refusing to receive the testimony of his brethren, and for his want of faith in the words spoken by Jesus on the subject when He was with them. Instead, He offers to his weak faith all the help it needs, and encourages him in the future to confidence and trust. Did Thomas reach forth his hand? Did he touch the wounds in the Lord's body? It seems not. The sight, the words, the condescension,

the love shown in this manifestation, revived the faith which the Crucifixion had nearly destroyed. What a revelation was then opened up before the soul of Thomas! It convinced him that Jesus had risen, it convinced him also that Jesus was Divine, as he exclaimed, 'My Lord and my God.' The faith of Thomas showed itself in laying hold of the truth which makes the resurrection a necessity as well as a fact of history. Jesus acknowledged the reality of Thomas's faith, after having seen, and added, '**Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.**' This blessedness may belong to us.

III. **Jesus on this Appearance renewed the Commission of the Apostles and conferred on them Powers to fit them for their Office** (John xx. 21-23).—As the Father had sent Him, so He sent them into the world. He renewed the commission of Apostleship which they had forfeited by their desertion. He sent them to preach the gospel of peace and reconciliation to men. To fit them for their work He gave them peace as His gift. As a sign that they would receive all the powers required to make them active agents in the kingdom of God, 'He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' From this act they would understand that the Holy Ghost, when He came, would fill them with new life and power. He entrusted to them, after they were endowed with the Holy Ghost, authority to declare to the penitent and believing the forgiveness of sins. Peter exercised this authority on the day of Pentecost when he said, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost' (Acts ii. 38). Along with this was given the power also of declaring condemnation on the impenitent and unbelieving. The Apostles were now restored to their position in the kingdom of God; they were now prepared to form proper views of the person and work of Jesus, and they were ready to receive those higher truths regarding Him which the Comforter would reveal at His coming.

PRACTICAL LESSON

Learn from this lesson that Jesus reveals Himself and spiritual truths to His people only when they are fitted to receive the revelation. To the believing, loving, pure heart He shows Himself in His fulness; to the doubting, lukewarm, and partly worldly He gives only a partial revelation of His glory. In love He condescends to meet their weak faith, but what blessedness they lose when they insist on seeing before they believe!

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Do not attempt to teach all contained in this lesson. Direct attention to the fact that this appearance was to Apostles. Why did He not appear to them first? Notice the fear and excitement produced by His appearance. The love and condescension of Jesus in gently reproving the Apostles for unbelief, then revealing Himself to them as the risen Lord and restoring them to their Apostleship.

XXXIX.—JESUS' APPEARANCE AT THE LAKE OF TIBERIAS

John xxi. 1-22

Revision.—In former lessons we have observed that the disciples were not prepared for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They did not expect it; and were unwilling to believe it after it was announced to them. They treated the report of the ministering women, who had been at the tomb and had seen visions of angels and the risen Lord, as idle tales; and they paid no attention to the message sent to them, 'Tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me' (Matt. xxviii. 10). They required convincing proof before they would believe that Jesus had risen. To different individuals and companies Jesus showed Himself. At last the doubts of all the Apostles were removed; they believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, as He had said. Full of joy and inspired with new hopes, they left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee, where He had promised again to meet them.

Sketch of Lesson (vv. 1-3).—I. **The Apostles in Galilee waiting for the Appearance of Jesus.**—They were glad to leave Jerusalem. What dark and sorrowful hours they had spent there! Everything recalled the memory of the sufferings Jesus had endured. It would be different in Galilee. Everything there would remind them of Jesus as a Master and Friend. They would think of Him there as healing the sick, giving sight to blind, raising the dead. Many places in Galilee would call up the image of Jesus in their minds, and keep Him ever in their thoughts. The sea of Tiberias (sea of Galilee—lake of Gennesaret) would specially remind them of Jesus. [Recall incidents.] His appearance to them there would do more to strengthen their faith in Him as the risen Christ than all the appearances that had taken place in Jerusalem. How glad they would be to meet Jesus again in Galilee! Probably they expected, when they came there, that *Jesus would appear to them at once.* They knew no reason why He should delay renewing intercourse with them. The angel had said to the women, 'Tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you' (Mark xvi. 7). But Jesus did not seem to have gone before them. Though days had passed since they came, though they had visited the places most frequented by Him when He was alive, though they had watched and waited and sought Him everywhere, yet *He did not manifest Himself to them.* What could be the meaning of this? Probably Jesus wished to test the faith of the Apostles by delaying His appearance. This delay made them act for themselves. To provide for their daily wants, they must work: to get relief from the anxious thoughts which filled their minds so long as Jesus did not appear, they must take up some occupation. Simon Peter said unto the others, 'I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately' (v. 3). This action on the part of Peter and the others did not mean that they no longer expected Jesus to appear and their faith was beginning to fail, nor a desire to return to the world and their old occupations. It showed their poverty, their willingness to work for themselves,

and their desire to forget their troubles in finding something to do. [Illustrate by showing how we feel when waiting anxiously for any one, how slowly time seems to pass, how glad when anything is given us to do that takes away our thoughts from our own troubles.]

II. **Jesus manifested Himself to the Apostles when they were engaged in their old work of Fishing** (vv. 4-14).—The work of the night was unsuccessful. The Apostles were reminded by this of a similar night (Luke v. 1-11) on the same lake. On that occasion Jesus stood by the lake in the morning. He entered into Simon's boat, from which He preached to the people, and then by causing a miraculous draught of fishes showed them that He was their Master. He called them to follow Him, and promised to make them fishers of men. Were these things passing through their minds on that morning when they saw through the dim light a stranger on the shore? Who could He be? 'Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.' One would have thought that the likeness to a former experience would have suggested to them, *Jesus has at last appeared.* But they did not know Him. He did not yet manifest Himself to them. They saw a man, but not Jesus. See how Jesus proceeded to make Himself known.

1. **By showing an interest in them.** He asked, 'Children, have ye any meat?' This shows He had not forgotten them. When they replied, 'No,' He gave directions where to cast the net, and they enclosed a 'multitude of fishes.' This result opened the eyes of John. The advice given, and the miracle which accompanied, reminded him of the former revelation of Jesus, and he said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' Peter may have been so intent on securing the fishes as not to think of the unknown person who advised them; but when he heard that it was Jesus, nets, fishes, boats, everything, were left behind in his eagerness to get near his Lord (v. 7). Jesus made Himself further known.

2. **By providing a meal for His disciples, and eating with them.** He gave them something to strengthen their bodies after the night's toil. He also strengthened their faith by showing Himself in this way to them. When they went ashore they found there 'a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread.' Jesus ordered them to bring also some of the fish caught. Then He asked them to breakfast, and took bread and gave them, and fish likewise. What care, compassion, and tender affection Jesus showed in these acts for His disciples! By these acts they all knew Him, but their reverence for Him was so great they 'durst not ask Him, who art Thou?'

III. **Jesus manifested Himself specially to Peter, and restored him to the Apostleship** (vv. 15-22).—The conversation with Peter, and his restoration to the office from which he had fallen, took place in the presence of the others. Jesus had on another occasion appeared to Simon alone (Luke xxiv. 34). We are not told what passed then between the Lord and the disciple who denied Him. Possibly then he received the assurance of personal forgiveness.

Here, by the sea of Tiberias, Jesus singled out Peter from the others, and said to him, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?** Once Simon would have answered 'Yes' with confidence (Matt. xxvi. 33). He had boasted that though all men should forsake Jesus, yet not he. But

the remembrance of the denial of his Lord had humbled him. He would no longer assert that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples. It was enough to be able to say, '**Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.**' He once thought he knew his own heart better than Jesus did, but here he appealed to Christ's knowledge. Peter in his answer did not use the same word for 'love' which Jesus had used in His question, so Peter did not fully answer the question of Jesus. He had declared his personal affection for Jesus, when Jesus had asked him to declare his love for Him in a divine and spiritual sense. So Jesus asked a second time, '**Lovest thou Me?**' Dost thou love Me with esteem and honour? Peter still answered, '**Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.**' **I have a strong personal affection for Thee.** Jesus asked a third time, '**Lovest thou Me?**' He used on this occasion the word 'love' in the sense used by Peter. **Dost thou love Me with personal affection?** It grieved him to be thus questioned. Could it be possible that he did not yet know his own heart? Did Jesus really doubt his sincerity, and expose him before all the others? Impossible. He could now reply humbly, yet confidently, appealing to Jesus who knew all things, and whom he recognised to be divine, '**Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.**' In answer to the first question Jesus said, '**Feed My lambs**'; to the second and third, '**Feed My sheep.**'

Peter's threefold declaration of love before the others removed the disgrace of the threefold denial of his Lord. And the threefold call to the work of the Shepherd, the feeding and taking care of young and old in the kingdom of God, restored him to the office and apostleship which he had forfeited. What an honour! Restored again to the favour of Christ; his sins forgiven, and called to work in restoring and saving others. But the honour implied suffering. There will come a time when he will prove the reality of his love and his devotion to his Master by martyrdom—death by crucifixion (vv. 18, 19). From henceforth Christ's command to him was, 'Follow Me.' This should have been enough for Peter to know, but he wished to know also what would happen to John (vv. 20-22). The Saviour's answer was partly a rebuke. He had told Peter his future to encourage him to do his duty, not to satisfy his curiosity, so He said regarding John, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' Peter's duty was plain—his path marked out by the Lord. His order was, '**Follow thou Me.**'

PRACTICAL LESSON

The importance and necessity of personal love to Jesus Christ.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

After sketching the scene—the Apostles waiting, returning to their old work, Jesus appearing—direct attention to His conversation with Peter. Mark that Jesus cares for children—said, 'Feed My lambs.'

XL.—JESUS' LAST COMMANDS AND ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN

Matt. xxviii. 16-20; Luke xxiv. 44-53

Introduction.—The appearance of Jesus which is here narrated by Matthew differs from the manifestations given by Jesus on other occasions, which are recorded by the other Evangelists. At other times Jesus appeared suddenly and unexpectedly. On this occasion He appointed the time, and the place of meeting—a mountain in Galilee. Formerly He manifested Himself to select individuals—the ministering women—favoured disciples—the eleven or some of them—but here He appeared to the eleven and 'above five hundred brethren at once' (1 Cor. xv. 6). Matthew in his account mentions only the eleven; but Paul evidently refers to the same appearance of Jesus, and says that more than five hundred were present. Matthew mentions the eleven only, as they represented the whole body of the disciples. The instructions which Jesus gave were meant specially for them, though they were intended in a general sense for all. This was the most impressive and glorious manifestation which Jesus had ever made. It was an appearance to the Church as a company of believers. On this occasion Jesus was worshipped by His disciples, and He revealed to them that their adoration was acceptable, as He manifested Himself to them as Lord 'in heaven and in earth.' He said, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.'

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **In this Manifestation Jesus revealed the New Relationship that was henceforth to exist between Him and His Disciples.**—(1) *Henceforth they were to worship Him.* There was no command given them to worship Jesus. Yet 'when they saw Him they worshipped Him, but some doubted' (Matt. xxviii. 17). Those who believed that He was the risen Saviour gave Him divine honours. They had been led gradually, since they heard of His resurrection, to think that He must be more than an ordinary man. His appearance among them, whenever He willed it, filled them with reverence and fear. They were conscious that He knew their thoughts and saw them when they did not see Him (John xx. 24-29; Luke xxiv. 15, 16). This made them think of Him as the Son of God in the highest sense. It reminded them of His claim to be one with the Father, and caused them to worship Him. '*But some doubted.*' None of the eleven Apostles were among the doubters. They had grown to a full faith in the resurrection of the Lord, through His love and condescension in revealing Himself in such a way as to remove all doubts. Some, however, of the five hundred were in suspense. They wanted more light. They had seen the risen Saviour for the *first time*, and doubted what to think and what to do. Jesus did not leave them in doubt. He came near. They were not to think of Him any longer as the poor and despised Jesus, but must honour Him as One who had been honoured by God. 'All power,' said He, 'is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.' Could they remain in doubt after this revelation? Would they not exclaim like Thomas, 'My Lord and my God,' and like the others worship Him? (2) *Henceforth they*

were to be His commissioners or representatives on earth. As the Father had sent Him, so He sent them out into the world. He was soon to return to the Father's right hand, but the work He had begun on earth was to be carried on by them. He had chosen them and instructed them, and manifested Himself to them after His resurrection in order to fit them for bearing witness unto Him, 'both in Jerusalem and in Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts i. 8; Luke xxiv. 47, 48).

II. **Jesus gave Instructions and Commands to His Disciples to guide them in carrying out their Commission** (Luke xxiv. 44-49; Matt. xxviii. 18-20).—The explanations and instructions recorded by Luke were not given on one occasion. We have there a summary of what Jesus taught His disciples during His several appearances to them. As soon as the disciples understood the great truths He taught them they were prepared to receive their commission anew from Christ. (1) *Jesus then communicated to them what their work was to be. He commanded them to fulfil their mission as His representatives.* He said, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations' (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). 'Go ye unto all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mark xvi. 15). (*a*) The Saviour commanded His disciples to make known His love to *all nations.* Tell them all that the Gospel contains, that God so loved the world (John iii. 16), that Jesus has reconciled men to God and has revealed Him as their Father—that through this reconciliation repentance and remission of sins are now offered to all. With the commission to proclaim the Gospel He gave the authority to baptize. (*b*) They were to make disciples and admit them to the Church through baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The disciples were to be separated from the world by a symbol which taught that they were consecrated to the service of the Father, as they had been redeemed by the death of the Son, and were to be the subjects of the grace and effectual working of the Holy Ghost. (*c*) They were to teach all who professed faith in Jesus to observe His commandments. The laws of the kingdom of God are contained in the Gospel. When the disciples heard the Saviour's commands and understood the nature of their commission they must have felt how unfit they were for such work. How could they preach to Gentiles? How tell them that God was their Father and Christ their Saviour? (2) *Jesus instructed them to wait till the power came that would prepare them for this work.* He said, 'I send the promise of the Father upon you.' That was the promise of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. For the fulfilment of this promise they must wait in Jerusalem. When the promise was fulfilled they were to begin preaching at Jerusalem. But though they were to begin at Jerusalem, they were not to remain there. They were to wait there till they received power from on high. After that they were to be witnesses for Christ 'unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts i. 8). *These instructions from Jesus show the love, the power, and the truth of the Gospel.*

Jesus had now accomplished all that He came into the world to do. **He must now return to the Father from whom He came.**

III. **The Ascension of Jesus** (Luke xxiv. 50-53).—*The Apostles had again returned to Jerusalem.* This doubtless took place under instructions from Jesus. He had renewed His intercourse with them in the city.

At the end of the forty days He ascended into heaven. The ascension of Jesus is so important that we point out the details. (*a*) The place from which He ascended was the Mount of Olives (Acts i. 12), which was 'over against Bethany.' (*b*) The witnesses of the ascension were the eleven Apostles, who were so unwilling to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. They were men who would not admit anything that happened after the death of Jesus to be true unless they had 'infallible proofs.' We may therefore conclude that they proclaimed the ascension of Jesus because they were witnesses of the event. (*c*) The manner of the ascension was in accordance with the revelations Jesus had given of Himself during the forty days. He could be manifest to the disciples or not as He thought fit. He had the power of showing His presence anywhere. At last 'He led them out as far as Bethany and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And while He blessed them He was parted from them and carried up into heaven' (Luke xxiv. 50, 51). What a glorious ending to His mysterious life! Those who saw this could explain the mystery connected with His sufferings and death. He now entered on His glory and sat at the right hand of God.

IV. **The effect of the Ascension on the Apostles and Disciples.**—They returned to Jerusalem entertaining higher and more spiritual views of Christ's person. He was now manifestly one with God. They worshipped Him. They were not grieved at His departure. They returned with great joy, 'and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.' Their joy and thankfulness were due not only to the promise that Jesus would send the Comforter—the Holy Ghost—but also to the fact that He had said, **'Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'** They had learned that in a spiritual sense they could still have Him as Lord and Master. They also rejoiced because the assurance was given them that He would come again (Acts i. 10, 11).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. The ascension of Jesus is a proof to us that His mission of reconciliation has been accomplished, and that His work has been accepted by the Father.

2. It is a pledge and proof that Jesus will do for His people all that He has promised. He will make them partakers of His glory, as they are of His nature.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

These were the last meetings between Jesus and His disciples. How important! What stress laid on His words and promises! How precious the promise—that He is with us always—with young, with old, at all seasons, in all circumstances.

LESSONS

FROM

ACTS AND EPISTLES

To the Teacher.—*The constant use of a* Map *is especially necessary in studying the Lessons from the Acts of the Apostles.*

LESSONS FROM ACTS

I.—THE TEN DAYS AFTER THE ASCENSION

33 A.D.

Acts i. 10-26

Sketch of Lesson.—Our lesson opens with a scene on the Mount of Olives (vv. 10, 11). Who are those men gazing into heaven? Had Jesus told those eleven faithful Apostles that He would leave them? Yes. Forty days ago, on the night of the Last Supper, He said, 'I go my way to him that sent me,' 'I go unto the Father,' 'I go to prepare a place for you.' What great events had happened since that night? Much had happened. (1) Judas Iscariot had betrayed the Lord to His enemies; (2) Jesus had been condemned by the chief priests and Pilate; (3) had suffered and died on the Cross for our sins; (4) had risen from the dead on the third day; (5) had appeared to various friends and disciples, in all eleven times; (6) and now He had been caught up in a cloud from Mount Olivet to the Father's right hand.

The Master had not quite left His disciples. They could no longer behold Him amongst them, but they had His sure word of promise. 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world' (Matt. xxviii. 20).

He had also given them the promise of the Holy Spirit the Comforter. 'If I depart,' Jesus said, 'I will send him unto you.' He would fill them with new power from on high, and bring the words of Jesus to their memory and keep His love in their hearts.

What was the work Jesus had appointed for His disciples? To make disciples of all nations.

God's fatherly love had provided a ransom for many. Jesus had died for our sins and overcome death and the grave.

But the world of sinful men and women did not know the Gospel—the good news of God's love. This Jesus desired to be taught them, but no longer on earth Himself to teach. Therefore He left it a charge to His Church. What is meant by the Church? Not a building of stone, as we sometimes use the word, but the whole number of Christ's followers. Compared to a building. It is a great spiritual temple built of souls; each believing soul a living stone; Jesus Himself the chief corner-stone; Apostles and early believers the foundation—the first row of stones laid in order. The Church then very small, now great and glorious, found in every land on earth, besides the great multitude who have passed into heaven. But built up stone by stone. How? By the Lord Jesus stirring up members of His Church to teach the ignorant, and by His spirit giving those taught grace to accept Him. So one after another is added. This the work of the glorified Jesus, and in this book of Acts we see the beginning of it.

To-day we consider a time of waiting and preparation.

I. A Waiting World.—You have seen a cornfield ripe and heavy just before the reapers begin work. It seems to be waiting for them. We see its need of reaping. The world of sinners like that field. It needs

the Gospel. A harvest of souls waited in darkness to be gathered into the garner of Christ's kingdom.

1. The **Jews** looked for a Messiah, but would not accept Jesus when He came. Blinded by sin and pride. Had just cried, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' But their hearts still unsatisfied. Nothing but the Gospel could fill them. Many Jews would yet see their error and believe and live.

2. The **Gentiles** or heathen worshipped idols. The Romans, proud of their strength and courage, had conquered the world.

The Greeks proud of their learning and skill, but both in darkness and great wickedness. And they did not know it. Had never learned God's law of right or their own need of a Saviour. Not only in wickedness but in great misery. Little pity or love among them. The rich proud and violent. The poor sad and oppressed. All cruel and brutal.

For weary hearts of Jew and Gentile the Gospel only remedy—the power of God unto salvation.

Now God had smoothed the way for the Gospel of Jesus to spread, prepared the field for the reapers.

1. He had brought **all nations under one ruling power**—Rome; so His servants could travel freely from place to place with His message of love.

2. He had brought **educated men in all lands to know one language.** Greek taught in all schools. So everywhere teachers would find some to understand them.

II. **A Waiting Church** (vv. 12-14).—The Apostles returned to Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey, about a mile and three quarters. We see them assembled in an upper chamber; not their home but their meeting-place; perhaps the very room where the Lord had taken the Last Supper. How full of holy memories now! the table, the seat where He reclined, etc. Those who have dear ones in heaven will understand. Who were present of that company (see vv. 13, 14)? One hundred and twenty persons. Among others His brethren, once unbelieving, now disciples.

Were those one hundred and twenty the whole Church of believers? Not at all; at least five hundred brethren had seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. xv. 6). Those one hundred and twenty were only the Church at Jerusalem, where the Lord's work must begin (Luke xxiv. 47).

Why did they not begin at once? The world was waiting for them, but the Master had commanded them to tarry till they should receive power from on high. The Lord can be served by waiting as well as by working. Illustrate. Young people sometimes impatient to be grown up. Think how much more they will do out in the world than now at home and at school. But God has given young days for waiting and preparation. Meanwhile, children please Him best by gentleness, diligence, truthfulness in their appointed place. More power and opportunity in due time.

III. **Election of a new Apostle.**—But now a special duty arises (vv. 15-26). Only eleven Apostles. How is this? The traitor Judas had destroyed himself. A horrible and hopeless death. But Peter, the oldest Apostle, had read in the Scriptures three prophecies—

1. That the traitor should be one of their company (v. 17; Ps. xli. 9).
2. That he would go to ruin (v. 20; Ps. lxix. 25).
3. That another should fill his 'bishopric' or office (v. 20; Ps. cix. 8).

First two already come to pass, and Peter maintains the third ought to follow.

But how elect a new Apostle?

Two things needed in him. (1) That he should have been with Jesus and the twelve during the Lord's three years' ministry. Thus a witness of the Resurrection, and of the Lord's holy life and teaching as well.

(2) He must be faithful, willing to suffer for Christ's sake.

The disciples could judge the first, so they chose two of their number. But could they judge the second? No. The Lord alone knoweth the heart. Besides, they believed both to be good men, but only one could be an Apostle. How then decide? They turn to the Master. Though ascended, He sees them, and knows their difficulty, and so they beg Him to choose (v. 24).

But how learn His choice? They cast lots. On each of two small tablets a name is written. Both are cast into an urn. It is shaken till one tablet falls out. It bears the name of Matthias. The sign is accepted, and Matthias becomes an Apostle. Is this a work of chance? No. It is done in faith and prayer.

Think what those early disciples teach us.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **To be grateful for present blessings.**—We have privileges they lacked—comfort, liberty, safety. The Holy Spirit, for whom they waited, has come, and is ever at work in the world and in the Church, turning hearts to the Lord, and confirming faith and love.

Are we, like them, joyful and grateful? Do we go to God's house regularly **to praise and bless him?**

2. **To trust in our living Master, and His promises.**—He never failed one faithful soul. He gives the Holy Spirit to all who ask Him.

3. **To be good and useful in God's temple, the Church.**—Fill earnestly our posts of duty at home, in school, at work. Pray continually, 'Thy kingdom come.' The Church still far from complete. Much work to do, many millions in darkness. With His help let us seek diligently their welfare.

Then when He comes again as the Apostles 'saw him go into heaven,' we shall have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In teaching this lesson it will be well to see that the class understands the point of New Testament history at which the narrative begins. A brief retrospect of the concluding portion of the Gospel story is therefore taken in the opening questions. The period between the Ascension and Pentecost forms in one sense an interval in the Christian dispensations. But we must guard against the idea that in the waiting time the Lord's living presence and power are suspended. On the contrary, the tokens of these are distinct. The whole attitude and spirit of the disciples—the 'great joy,' the faith, the patient expectation, the sustained prayerfulness, the confident reference to the Lord's decision in electing a new Apostle—must all be pointed out as proofs of the presence of the Master.

II.—THE DAY OF PENTECOST

33 A.D.

Acts ii.

Read in class vv. 1-15, 22-24, 37-41

Introduction.—Last Sunday we read of the Church at Jerusalem waiting. For what did the disciples wait? For the Holy Ghost, whom Jesus had promised that the Father should send in His name (John xiv. 26). What is meant by the Holy Ghost? God the Spirit, the third person of the Godhead.

Was He not in the world already? Yes, He had always dwelt in good men's hearts, teaching them the will of God, and causing them to love good and hate evil. He had inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures of the Old Testament (1 Pet. i. 21). At the baptism of Jesus He appeared in the form of a dove (Matt. iii. 16). He dwelt in the human soul of Jesus without measure (John iii. 34). And now He was to come upon the disciples of Jesus in a new fulness and power. For what purpose? To lead their souls into all truth, and to fit them for the great work of teaching the love of God to a sinful world. Through the Spirit, Jesus was to manifest His presence in the Church.

For ten days the one hundred and twenty disciples had waited at Jerusalem, praying, trusting, expecting. To-day we see **the Lord's promise fulfilled.**

I. **The Manner of the Spirit's Coming** (vv. 1-13).—Pentecost means fiftieth day—after the Passover. A great festival of the Jews when they came to the temple with thank-offerings for the newly gathered harvest.

The Church now to celebrate a harvest of souls. A fellowship meeting in the upper chamber, about the third hour, *i.e.* nine in the morning.

Suddenly a loud noise like wind shook the building. A bright light like fire appeared and separated in the form of tongues, one resting on each of the one hundred and twenty disciples.

At once all were filled with joyful excitement. They began to declare God's praise, in languages they had never learned.

This miracle drew a crowd to the spot.

At that time Jerusalem full of strangers. Just as now there are German Jews living in Germany and speaking German Spanish Jews, Russian Jews, English Jews, etc., all living among Gentiles, and speaking Gentile tongues, so then there were Jews dwelling in every nation in the civilised world (vv. 9, 10, 11), and some of them had come to Jerusalem, the nation's home, to worship at the temple.

Along with the Jews were 'proselytes'—Gentiles born, but turned from idols to worship the God of Israel.

All these hastened to the place and were astonished (v. 7). Why? Because the disciples were nearly all men of Galilee, plain and unlearned. Yet each stranger heard God's works proclaimed in his own tongue (v. 8). **Now this miracle was for a sign in these ways—**

1. Like wind the Holy Spirit works. Himself unseen, but all see the effect. He stirs and refreshes men's souls.

2. Like fire He warms cold hearts with holy love, makes dark places light, and purifies from corruption.

3. By the gift of tongues God showed the world that the disciples were in truth His servants. He also reminded the Church that her message of love is to all nations, and must be heard in all languages.

Devout Jews stood in reverent wonder; but all were not devout. Wherever the Holy Spirit works, some will be found mocking (vv. 12, 13).

II. **Peter's Testimony.**—Once Jesus said, 'Thou art Peter (a rock), and on this rock I will build My church' (Matt. xvi. 18). Since then Peter had denied his Master and been forgiven (Matt. xxvi. 70; John xxi. 19). The Master had prayed for him (Luke xxii. 32). The Holy Ghost had now given him courage and power, and he was about to fulfil the word of the Lord by standing foremost among the Apostles.

1. **Peter explained the miracle** (vv. 14-20).—The mockers' taunt of drunkenness not to be thought of. Even wicked men seldom drink at the third hour. No! This is the time foretold by the prophet Joel eight hundred years ago (Joel ii. 28-32). To-day God has fulfilled that promise. Meanwhile let all who would be saved call upon His name in faith and prayer.

2. **Peter went on to preach Christ.**—Think of the courage given him to speak of Jesus of Nazareth to that crowd, who thought of Him as a dead criminal. We can only mark the chief points in Peter's sermon. He proclaims to the crowd—(*a*) The holy character of Jesus, 'a man approved of God' (v. 22). (*b*) Their own wickedness in putting Him to death. (*c*) The power and wisdom of God that turned their evil doing to serve His own purposes of love. **God** sent Jesus of Nazareth to work signs and wonders amongst them (v. 22). They had crucified Him, but **God** foresaw their evil-doing, and by it wrought redemption (v. 23). (*d*) **God** raised Jesus from the dead (vv. 24, 32). **God** hath exalted Him to His own right hand (v. 33), and made Him '**Lord**' over all things, and '**Christ**' the Messiah of His chosen people (v. 36).

To **God** then be the praise and the glory, to them the guilt and the shame.

III. **The Effect of Peter's Sermon.**—Do you remember the words of the Shorter Catechism? A. 89. 'The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word,' etc. Repeat the answer.

So it was now. The word on Peter's lips was the sword of the Spirit, 'quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword.'

1. **Many were convinced of sin**—'pricked to the heart' (v. 37). Saw how wicked they had been. Fifty days ago had cried, 'Crucify Him!' Now, 'What shall we do?'

2. **Many were converted.**—Observe Peter's reply (vv. 38-40). '**Repent**,' *i.e.* turn from evil ways. All saving faith must begin thus. But what more? '**Be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (*i.e.* forgiveness) of sins' (v. 38). Why did he not rather say, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ'? Because baptism with true repentance implied faith.

In baptism God assures the believer of pardon and grace; the believer openly confesses his faith and declares himself the Lord's servant.

Baptism is not for believers alone, but for their children (v. 39). Christ's disciples are called not to leave their little ones outside the Church, but to bring them in and present them to the Lord.

Baptized children thus belong doubly to Jesus. His by **redemption.** He gave His life a ransom for them. His also by **baptism.** Dedicated to His service. Children must not forget this; Jesus does not.

On that day three thousand Jews believed and were baptized. For many hours the ceremony must have gone on (v. 41).

How rich the Church's harvest! How joyful her harvest home that night! The 120 become 3120. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts' (Zech. iv. 6).

IV. **The young Church steadfast.**—The Spirit by means of the Word '**convinced** and **converted.**' He also '**built up in holiness and comfort.**' We have seen how He wrought **repentance** and **faith.** He also wrought **love.** The disciples felt like one loving family. 'They had all things common.' We shall learn more of this in another lesson. Meanwhile see the fruits of loving fellowship.

1. To the disciples it gave 'gladness and singleness of heart.' A happy time of precious memory. The Church's spring morning.

2. Among others it gave the Church favour. It also won converts. Nothing draws like joy and love. Nothing repels like selfishness and ill-will. Through the love the Holy Ghost wrought in her members, the Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **The Holy Ghost has ever remained in the Church.**—Through Him our living Master has wrought His work in men's souls. The Holy Ghost gives us power to understand the Word, to mark our sins and repent of them, to believe in Jesus for their forgiveness, to love one another, to resist temptation. Without His aid we are lost and helpless. Let us give thanks to God for His unspeakable gift.

2. **See that we cherish His presence and pay heed to His promptings.**—He shows us our sins and offers salvation in Christ. But He does not **force** us to repent and believe. If we neglect the Word, His great instrument of power, and are careless of prayer, and never think that we belong to Jesus, the Holy Ghost can do us no good. We would 'grieve' Him, 'despise' Him, 'quench' Him, so that His saving work in us would cease. Let us watch and pray, that when God, the Holy Ghost calls us, we be ready to hearken and obey.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In a lesson upon this long and highly important chapter, several points of moment must of necessity be omitted. Dwell chiefly on Sections I., III., and IV., referring to II. in more general terms.

Be distinct on the **personality** of the Holy Ghost. Never let Him be mentioned in class as **it.**

III.—THE OPPOSITION OF THE JEWS

33, 34 A.D.

Acts iv.

Read in class vv. 1-22

Introduction.—What did we read of last Sunday? The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

What were the signs of His coming? What gift did each disciple at Jerusalem receive? Recall the effects of His coming.

1. **On St. Peter.**—Gave courage and confidence to preach the Gospel faithfully.

2. **On the crowd.**—Gave the preached word power to convince and convert, so that three thousand believed and were baptized.

3. **On the Apostles.**—Gave power to work signs and wonders.

4. **On the Church.**—Inspired not only faith but love and generous goodwill. 'They had all things common.'

Immediately after Pentecost the Church enjoyed peace and prosperity. Every day the Lord added souls in the way of salvation. Could this happiness last? No. Christ's followers are servants of a crucified Master. Though Himself risen and exalted, His enemies still at work. The Lord had said, 'The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you' (John xv. 20).

To-day we read of the first persecution of the disciples.

I. **The Arrest** (vv. 1-4).—A scene in a court of the temple. It is evening. A crowd gathered to listen to two speakers alternately addressing them. As we look we recognise Peter and John. They proclaim salvation through Jesus. Hear their words: 'God sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities' (iii 26).

Of a sudden appear some priests and guards with their captain—the same party that one night not long ago visited Gethsemane. They push through the crowd, seize the speakers, drag them to prison, and lock them up for the night.

Why this violence? That afternoon (see chap. iii.) Peter and John had healed a lame man in the name of Jesus. As the people stood wondering they had preached the Gospel. Told them of Jesus, the heaven-sent Deliverer, and how they and their rulers had sinned in crucifying Him. But God in mercy had turned their wicked act to serve His work of salvation. He had raised Jesus from the dead. He now offered them pardon and grace. But to receive these they must repent and believe.

This preaching 'grieved,' *i.e.* offended—

1. **The priests.**—Because it condemned them. They had stirred up the people to cry 'Crucify Him!' and to choose Barabbas before Jesus (Matt. xxvii. 20).

2. **The Captain of the Temple.**—A Jew in command of the temple guards. Under the high priest. Feared a tumult. His duty to keep order.

3. **The Sadducees.**—Rich and proud Jews. Despised poor men's religion. Believed in no resurrection.

All these troubled by the Gospel. Hoped they had heard the last of Jesus of Nazareth. And now here were men teaching that God had raised Him from the dead, and that He is the Messiah, the nation's Deliverer.

Resolved to silence the Apostles. Hence the arrest. Did it succeed? Never. The Apostles were put in bonds, but '**The word of God is not bound.**' It 'prospered in the thing whereto He sent it.' The opposition of worldly men only showed the strength of the Gospel cause. Enthusiasm stirred, sympathy roused. By that night the Church had increased to five thousand. No doubt, both in the prison and in the upper chamber, prayer and faith and love more earnest than ever.

II. **The Trial and Testimony** (vv. 5-22).—Next morning a meeting of the Jews' Council. Annas, the leader of the priests, Caiaphas, the high priest, among them. Seventy of the wisest of the nation, learned scribes and rulers of the synagogue. All seated around in a half-circle, and in the centre the prisoners Peter and John.

Were the Apostles afraid? No. Remember the promise, 'I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist' (Luke xxi. 15).

Now the question put (v. 7). A miracle evidently done. By what authority? The law punished those who called upon any name but the name of God. The Council hoped to find them guilty thus (Deut. xiii. 1-5).

No doubt of Peter's answer this time. What had he done once in that very hall? Denied his Master. But Peter at the bar very different from Peter in the porch. Then boastful and weak; now humble and yet strong. Why? Full of the Holy Ghost. Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. He proclaims Jesus to be—

1. **The Healer of Infirmity** (v. 10).—'By the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised up.'

2. **The Church's one Foundation.**—They, the builders of the old Jewish Church, despised Him as unworthy. In God's Church to-day the Headstone of the corner (v. 11).

3. **The only Saviour of sinners.**—And among sinners Peter includes all present. 'We'—prisoners, judges, guards, all mankind (v. 12). All have an interest in Christ if they will only accept Him.

How was this testimony received?

1. **With wonder.**—How could unlearned men speak thus? Then remembered how Jesus of Nazareth spake. Some of them had asked then, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' So they now 'took knowledge' of the two Apostles' likeness to Jesus, in whose company they had seen them.

2. **With perplexity.**—Dared not punish the Apostles. Consulted together, but at a loss how to act. The man once lame stood there cured, a witness of the Apostles' power.

3. **With anger.**—Baffled, they threatened and forbade any more preaching and teaching. But did the Apostles promise obedience? Yes, obedience—but to God first (vv. 19, 20).

III. **The Release and Welcome** (vv. 23-31).—The scene changed once more to the upper chamber. Many disciples waiting in prayer and anxiety that morning. What of Peter and John? What awaits themselves next?

But behold the two Apostles appear at liberty. What joy and thanksgiving! How eager the attention to the Apostles' story (v. 23)!

And now all join in prayer and adoration. Observe what they pray for. Not escape from trouble. The word of God prophesies trouble (vv. 25, 26; see Ps. ii.) Their experience leads them to expect trouble (vv. 27-29). They ask God (1) **for boldness and utterance** to deliver His message faithfully; (2) **for His power** to confirm the word with signs and wonders done in the name of Jesus.

And the Lord does not delay His answer. At that trying hour He gives prompt assurance of His living presence (Matt. xxviii. 20). Again the house shaken as at Pentecost. A new outpouring of the Spirit, and every heart filled with a new measure of faith and courage.

IV. **The Love of the Brethren.**—With increase of **faith** and **courage** the Holy Spirit wrought increase of **love.**

'All things common' (v. 32). This out of goodwill. Also because many expected the Lord Jesus to return very soon. And therefore they set little store by lands and possessions, but sold them for the general good. They gave joyfully because freely. We give a present more gladly than a tax. Among the rest was Joses, surnamed Barnabas. One day to be known as a faithful Apostle to the Gentiles.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Do not be surprised if you have to suffer for Christ's sake.** Unless very foolish in our service, none of us are ever likely to be imprisoned for it.

But if Christians indeed, we are certain sometimes to be misunderstood, to suffer unjust blame, perhaps to be laughed at for doing what we believe to be the Lord's will. Remember that is a part of our life as Christ's disciples in a sinful world. It will be a very bad sign of our faithfulness if all goes well and smoothly at all times.

2. **From Peter and John learn Christian firmness.**—It does not boast, or threaten, or grow conceited, but in meekness goes on obeying **the Lord first.** If we are faithful to Christ we shall be unruly to no one. When we must say **no** to a friend or companion, it will be said without self-will.

3. **Learn to be diligent in prayer.** — The one sure way to keep strong in spirit and faithful is to pray. Pray regularly, pray earnestly, pray expecting a blessing. 'Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart' (Ps. xxvii. 14).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The keynote of this lesson is Christian courage. 'Trust in God, and do the right.' The teacher ought to insist upon the *Christian* quality of the courage desired. It is courage exercised in the Lord's service, in the Lord's spirit, and through humble trust in the Lord's present aid. Therefore it must never be disrespectful, unkind, or uncivil.

IV.—ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

34 A.D.

Acts v. 1-11

Read in class vv. 1-11

Introduction.—In last lesson we read of the persecution of Peter and John. How was this trial blessed to the Church? A new outpouring of the Holy Spirit; courage, faith, love renewed; all things common; no one in want; no one envious; all full of hearty goodwill.

But now a new danger arose. How? Through the wiles of **Satan**, the **Spirit of Evil.**

What had Satan done at the beginning of history (Gen. iii.)?

As he sought to ruin the work of creation, he would fain ruin the work of redemption.

At the outset of our Lord's ministry, whose temptations was He called to meet and overcome (Matt. iv. 1-11)?

Who stirred up the evil passions of the Jews against Jesus (John viii. 38, 44)?

Who led Judas Iscariot to play the traitor (John xiii. 2)?

Who tempted Peter to deny his Master, and 'desired to have' him (Luke xxii. 31)?

To Satan's charge we must also lay the persecution of John and Peter. Disappointed in that attempt, he now seeks to ruin the Church by corrupting the hearts of its members.

I. **The Temptation to Sin.**—We have already seen the generous conduct of Barnabas and other rich disciples (iv. 34).

Among them Ananias and Sapphira; seem to have been clever, managing people, man and wife taking counsel together on their affairs. A blessed fellowship when used to serve the Lord. No doubt had received at baptism a share of gifts from the Holy Ghost. Rejoiced in the thought of salvation.

But now a **testing time** came.

What is their besetting weakness? They are fond of money; also fond of praise. Love to be thought liberal and devoted; but not to feel poor. Their possessions sold. A sum of money on hand. They consider what to do with it.

Several courses open.

1. **Shall they give all to the Church?** *Afraid* to do this. Faith too weak. What if the Church should come to naught? Also unwilling to part with so much money; they love it so.

2. **Shall they then openly give a part and keep the remainder?** That at least an honest course, and quite lawful. The money in their own power (v. 4). But *ashamed* to do this. Would lose credit. Desire to be respected like Barnabas and others. So love of gain points one way, love of praise another. Only one love could overcome both of these—the love of Christ; and, alas! that love is too weak in them.

Now to those souls in doubt Satan whispers yet another course.

3. **Why not have both money and praise?** No one knows the price you got. Give the Church a good sum, and keep the remainder without saying a word. No one will doubt that you have given all, and it is not your business to enlighten them. It is very unlikely that you will be questioned; and if you are, it will be time enough to decide what to reply. Thus the father of lies reasons. What will those tempted ones do? Reject the false thought with horror? start back as from the brink of a precipice, and call upon the Lord for mercy and strength? Well if they did; that were true wisdom. The Lord was waiting to help them.

But no. 1. They **attend** to the evil prompting; consider it; let it sink into their hearts like seed into the ground.

2. They **talk it over** (vv. 2, 9). The fellowship God gave to them for good they turn to evil. No doubt they excuse the false course as necessary, only sensible, others likely to have done the same.

3. They **adopt it.** Alas! the evil one has prevailed once more. Now see the fruit of his devices.

II. **The Sinful Act.**—1. **Ananias' Part.**—Comes to the Apostles, money in hand, and lays the offering at their feet (v. 2). What do bystanders suppose? That the whole price of his possession is devoted. What has Ananias forgotten? That it is not man but the **Holy Ghost**, the **all-seeing God**, he is thus attempting to deceive. What then is his sin? He has *said* nothing. No; but he has tried to make the Apostles believe an untruth. An acted lie as bad as one spoken. And this false act very bad, for committed

(*a*) Through **pride.** Tried to seem a better man than he was.

(*b*) Through **greed.** Thought by a false act to take care of himself.

(*c*) Through **distrust of God.** Knew the need for consecration of goods at the time, but could not commit his interests to the Lord.

(*d*) Through **presumption.** Ventured to trifle with God and God's Church. 'Tempted,' *i.e.* tried presumptuously the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9).

2. **Sapphira's part.**—'Privy to it,' a helpmeet in evil. Came to the upper chamber to seek her husband. Already sinned deeply. But God gave her one more opportunity (v. 8). So God often tries sinners in order to allow a place for repentance, or else make clear their guilt. No avail in Sapphira's case. Steadfast in deceit. Perhaps thought her husband's word doubted. Bound to support him, so *uttered* a lie.

III. **Sin's Wages.**—1. **Prompt exposure.**—The lie at once detected. The evil conspiracy openly condemned. Forgot that all things naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom they had to do (Heb. iv. 13).

2. **Prompt punishment.**—No sooner convicted than the hand of God cut them off (vv. 5-11). *Describe incident.* Sharers in sin, in detection, in a grave. Satan had sought to ruin the Church; he only ruined two souls, and these at once dropt out. You remember how the Lord said, 'Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away' (John xv. 2). Why? In order that the others may bear much fruit. So here the Church, cleansed of unscrupulous self-seekers, warned by a terrible example, went on her way with reverence and godly fear (v. 11).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **The Evil One never idle** (1 Pet. v. 8).—The father of lies seeks to adopt all as his children, and nowhere does he work more earnestly than among the disciples of Jesus Christ. Nothing so fatal to Christian character as want of truthfulness, whether in word or action. To try to make others think better of us than we deserve; to gain selfish ends by untruth; to forget God's presence and live as if His all-searching eye not upon us: all common temptations and very dangerous. God does not punish now so suddenly as He did then, but the death of Ananias and Sapphira a type of the ruin of the soul that yields to them.

2. **Take courage.**—We cannot help being tempted. **Jesus Himself was tempted** to distrust, presumption, and self-seeking (Matt. iv. 1-11). But the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation (2 Pet. ii. 9). No boy or girl ever prayed to be kept true of heart, speech, and behaviour, but the Lord heard them. What is the promise? 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you' (Jas. iv. 7, 8).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

1. Whatever views a teacher may hold regarding the personality of the evil spirit, the only way to instruct young children in the truth of this passage is to present it in concrete form. Satan must be set forth as an active agent in the tragedy. This is the divine method adopted in the Old Testament and the New. To attempt any other way of putting it would create confusion, and raise questions that young children are not expected to discuss.

2. It is of great importance to dwell on the practical identity of falsehood in all its forms—the spoken lie, the acted lie, the prevarication, the evasion of truth. No one better than another, and all proofs of a heart not right with God. See that it be understood that to lead any one to believe what is different from the reality is to be guilty of lying.

3. Let stress be laid upon the responsibility of every Christian to withstand Satan's wiles, because victory is pledged by God. Point out that this guilt would not have belonged to Ananias and Sapphira unless they had received power to resist temptation. And the same divine power is with us now.

V.—STEPHEN

36 A.D.

Acts vi. 8–vii. 60

Read in class vi. 8-15; vii. 48-60

Introduction.—By what title is Stephen known? The first martyr. What is a martyr? A witness. Not only one who has seen, but one who bears testimony to what he knows and believes. Chap. iv. told us of Peter and John bearing witness (v. 20) and suffering for it. In chap. v. we read of all the Apostles testifying to Jesus (vv. 30, 31, 32). All these martyrs in their measure. Stephen called the first martyr because he first bore witness even unto death. His name, Stephen or Stephanos, means a crown,—fitting name for the wearer of the first martyr's crown (Rev. ii. 10).

Consider to-day how Stephen bore witness to Jesus Christ.

I. **In his Daily Life.**—A deacon; the chief of seven disciples chosen by the Church to take care of widows and the poor (vi. 5). Fed the hungry, succoured the needy and distressed. Like the Master, 'went about doing good' (x. 38).

God had given Stephen the power of miracles (v. 8). Like the Master, he healed the sick, cured the blind and deaf, cast out devils. Jerusalem full of such afflicted folk. Moreover, Stephen's character 'full of faith and power.' Had received not only the gift of miracles, but the grace of a holy life. As far as a sinful man could be, he was like the Master, 'holy, harmless, undefiled.' Also full of zeal for God and truth. Went to the synagogues or churches of the Greek-speaking Jews, and showed how the Gospel fulfilled the old prophecies (v. 9).

Like the Master, opposed by Jews of all sects and put them to silence (v. 10; compare Mark xii. 34). Stephen spake as one having authority, but his authority was derived from the Lord whom he served. In all these things a true witness to Christ. No one who had known Jesus could meet Stephen without being reminded of the Master. The sort of witness this, that He seeks us all to be. We have not received Stephen's gifts, but the Holy Spirit seeks to make the youngest as well as the oldest like the Master.

II. **In his Trial.**—As the Jews treated the Master so they treated His faithful disciple. Unable to silence him by fair means they tried foul.

1. **'Suborned men'** (v. 11), *i.e.* persuaded them by bribes or threats to accuse Stephen of blasphemy—profane speech against God. In particular, charged him with saying that Jesus should destroy the temple and change all their worship (v. 14).

2. **Stirred up the people.**—Till now only the priests and rulers had opposed the Church. The common people had favoured it (ii. 47), perhaps because of the miracles of mercy. But now the rulers turned the crowd to their side. Every Jew proud of the temple. It was the chief glory of their city. Reminded them of ancient renown. The centre of the nation whither Jews from all parts of the earth came to worship. A great means of profit. Stephen accused of speaking against the temple. Quickly the people grew

excited and angry. Stephen arrested, led before the Sanhedrin or council of seventy.

Once more we are in the high priest's hall.

Since Jesus stood before Annas and Caiaphas several disciples in that judgment hall, but **none** so like the Master as this. The **accusation** very similar. Perhaps the same **suborned witnesses** (Matt. xxvi. 59-61). The same **judges** sitting in state. How does the prisoner appear? Afraid? scornful? sullen? Any trace of guilt or shame? No. His face as the face of an angel (v. 15). Calm with a good conscience. Brightened, like Moses on the mount (Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30), by high thoughts and holy fellowship.

III. **In his Defence.**—A long speech (vii. 1-53). We can only notice the chief things he said.

1. **Did not deny his belief that the temple would be destroyed.** But showed that to teach this was not blasphemy against God or Moses. Why? Because God among His people long before there was a temple. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 2-8). With Joseph in Egypt (v. 9). With Moses in Midian—a bush for a sanctuary (vv. 30-34). With Israel in the wilderness, and no temple, only a tent (v. 44). This tabernacle or tent Joshua—here called Jesus in Greek—brought with him to Canaan (v. 45). And even when the temple built, Solomon remembered that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. And the prophets taught the same truth (vv. 48-50; Isa. lxvi. 1, 2).

In this teaching Stephen testified to Christ. The Master had said, 'In this place is one greater than the temple' (Matt. xii. 6). And again, 'The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father' (John iv. 21-24; also Matt. xviii. 20).

2. **Boldly condemned his audience.** Worse than their fathers. Their fathers persecuted the prophets, but they had murdered the Just One—the Messiah—whom the prophets foretold (vv. 51, 52). They pretended to honour the law given by God from Sinai amid hosts of angels (Ps. lxviii. 17), but broke it by their wickedness (v. 53). Compare the Master's terrible words (Matt. xxiii. 31-39; also Luke xx. 9-16).

IV. **In his Death** (vv. 54-60).—Like the Master, Stephen was shamefully treated. Not allowed to go on with his defence. The grave council of seventy felt the force of the truth but would not yield to it, so sat gnashing their teeth with rage at Stephen. But the Holy Ghost sustained him with a wondrous vision. Gazing upwards in prayer, suddenly he exclaimed that he beheld—what? the heavens opened, and Jesus, the Son of man, who once stood in that hall, now standing at the right hand of God. Observe, not *sitting* (Ps. cx. 1), but *standing*, to encourage and welcome His faithful martyr.

Did the announcement startle the council? No; furious passion now blinded them to everything from above. Thought Stephen's words blasphemous raving. Seized him, dragged him through the streets, he no doubt thinking of the day when his Lord trod the same sad path (John xix. 17). Arrived outside the city gate, perhaps at Golgotha, the witnesses were called on, according to Jewish law, to begin the onslaught (Deut. xvii. 7). The better to do this they took off their loose outer robes and gave them in

charge—to whom? Saul of Tarsus, a young scholar and Pharisee, soon to be an Apostle of Jesus. Meanwhile helping a mob to murder a disciple: learning from the sufferer a lesson of faith and love that bore rich fruit.

And now see Stephen among his murderers. A faithful witness to Jesus. He prays, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' just as the Lord commended His Spirit to the Father (Luke xxiii. 46). Then sore stricken he kneels, and like Jesus, he prays for his murderers (v. 60; Luke xxiii. 34), and soon his head droops and his bruised and mangled body lies low. 'He fell asleep'—asleep in Jesus. Absent from the body, present with the Lord (2 Cor. v. 8). His soul welcomed in Paradise. His body to rest in the dust under the Lord's keeping, until the day 'when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption' (1 Cor. xv. 53).

To the eye of sight vanquished; to the eye of faith 'more than a conqueror' (Rom. viii. 37). Remember our Shorter Catechism (A. 37). So it was with Stephen.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. Learn from Stephen to **witness daily for Christ.** We may never be called to die for His sake, but every one of us is called to live for His sake—in faith, in kindness, in gentleness. We are called by the Master's name—Christians; therefore our lives must either honour or disgrace the name we bear. Must either be faithful witnesses or false ones.

2. Learn to **speak the truth in love.** Stephen was brave and honest, but always full of goodwill. We may be fearless and zealous for God, but if we are unkind and impatient, we do not bear true witness for the Master. We overcome evil only when by God's grace we continue to forgive and love and bless (Matt. v. 44, 45; Rom. xii. 21).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Throughout this lesson never lose sight of the Master. There is no Bible character where the likeness to Jesus Christ is so clear and easily traced as in Stephen. Stephen's long address may be referred to very briefly.

VI.—PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

36 A.D.

Acts viii. 5-40

Read in class vv. 5-13, 26-40

Introduction.—In last lesson we saw a disciple abide faithful unto death. After Stephen's murder persecution grew so fierce that nearly all the Church except the Apostles fled from Jerusalem (viii. 1). Did this stop the progress of the Gospel? Quite the opposite. Scatter a fire in a dry place and it does not go out, but kindles new fires. So the disciples, full of the holy fire of God's Spirit, scattered through a dry parched world, preached and gathered converts wherever they went. Men's weary souls recognised God's provision for their needs (v. 4).

To-day our lesson about Philip, one of those disciples.

I. **Philip in Samaria.**—Philip not the Apostle, but a deacon, like Stephen (vi. 5). Called also the Evangelist or Gospel preacher (xxi. 8). Driven from Jerusalem he went north to Samaria, probably to the city of Sychar. Found there a people prepared for his message, though meanwhile led astray. How was this? (1) The Samaritans neither Jews nor heathen; believed in the true God, though they would not worship Him in the temple. They reverenced Abraham and the great and holy men of old. Moreover, Jesus had preached to them four years ago. The woman of Samaria then brought to cry, 'Is not this the Christ?' (John iv. 29). The men of Sychar 'heard Him themselves, and knew that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world' (John iv. 42). No doubt the memory of that visit still amongst the Samaritans and easily recalled.

(2) Led astray by a man called Simon, a conjurer who had by tricks persuaded the Samaritans that he was a messenger from God. Philip soon turned the people away from Simon by working in the name of Jesus miracles of mercy and love, such as Simon's tricks could not imitate (vv. 6, 7). Philip also preached Christ to them, *i.e.* told the story of the Lord's life, death, and resurrection, and held forth forgiveness and grace to all who would believe. There was great joy in that city because of the cures Philip wrought; deeper joy because of the Gospel he preached. Many entered the Church by baptism. Once Jesus, looking over this very district, said—(see John iv. 35, 36). Now Philip privileged to reap where Jesus had sown. Presently Simon believed and was baptized, but his faith very ignorant. Only saw in Philip a greater conjurer than himself, and hoped to learn how Philip's wonders in the name of Jesus were done. God through His Apostles was soon to teach Simon his mistake. See vv. 14-24.

Meanwhile we leave Samaria and follow Philip.

II. **On Special Service.**—No doubt Philip would gladly have stayed with his new converts in Samaria, but the Lord had work for him elsewhere (v. 26). Like a good soldier Philip at once obeyed the call. Once the Lord's will known, His disciples have but one duty—

'Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.'

See Philip now on the rocky desert road near Hebron, leading from Jerusalem by Gaza down to Egypt. Not a village near, hardly a dwelling. All around hills, rocks, scanty grass, stunted bushes. What Gospel work can be here? The Master who brought him here knows. The Captain of man's salvation never calls a soldier to move for nothing. **Wherever the Master places us He has something for us to do—for the youngest as well as the oldest. If we do not perceive it, just wait a little and His Spirit will open our eyes.**

III. **An honest and good Heart** (vv. 27-30).—As Philip waited a party of travellers drew near. Black men. One richly dressed sitting in a chariot. Guards around. Slaves running in front to clear the way. Who was this? A great man of Ethiopia—*now Soudan and Abyssinia, south of Egypt.* Treasurer of State under Queen Candace. A trusted servant. Why on this journey? Because a Jew in religion—a proselyte—and had been at Jerusalem to worship God in the temple. This man was **candid and willing to learn.** Jews who lived in Egypt near his home had taught him about the true God. Since he joined the Jewish Church he had learnt to prize the Scriptures. Found many things plain and of great help. Also many things hard to understand. **But he did not therefore neglect them.** He read them over and over in hope that light would come some day. Thus engaged now. Philip, urged by the Spirit, drew near and heard him reading aloud the Greek version of the prophecies of Esaias or Isaiah (vv. 32, 33, *i.e.* Isa. liii. 7, 8). Suddenly the reader heard an abrupt question; looked up and saw a Jewish stranger. See now this man's **teachable character.** Took no offence but answered meekly, and invited Philip to come up and help him (vv. 30, 31). Would miss no opportunity to learn. And now Philip saw why the Lord brought him hither. Preached Jesus. We can easily imagine the discourse. Took the prophecy for a text, and showed how Jesus fulfilled it hundreds of years after it was made (Old Testament, Lesson XXXV.) Jesus the Lamb of God wounded for our transgressions. His life taken from the earth. Also the Conqueror of death. Now ascended to prepare a place for His people, and left His Church on earth to preserve and spread His Gospel. No doubt Philip dwelt on the Lord's parting command (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). What was the result?

IV. **A joyful Convert.**—1. **The Ethiopian was baptized** (vv. 36, 38). Declared and confirmed his faith by enrolling at his own request among the disciples of Jesus. A striking scene at that wayside pool. The son of Abraham admitting the son of Ham to brotherhood in Christ Jesus. A wonderful story for the slaves and soldiers to carry home to Ethiopia.

2. **The Ethiopian departed rejoicing** (v. 39). He had not required miracles to convince him. The truth of itself enough. The prophecies no more a mystery but full of light. All life full of light. His own heart full of a light and joy and gladness never known before. Old things had passed away, all things had become new.

The Gospel spread very early in those regions, and the Abyssinian nation very early became Christian. The influence of the Ethiopian probably began the change. **And what of Philip?** This duty done, the Holy Spirit called him away to preach in the towns of Western Palestine. There is no need to suppose a miracle here. Philip at the Spirit's prompting tarried no

longer with the Ethiopian, but departed to preach the Gospel in the western cities (vv. 39, 40).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. From Philip learn **ready obedience to the call of present duty.** God calls us now, not by an angel, but by conscience, His word and the circumstances of our lives. We do not know what is coming next year, next month, next week, perhaps do not understand God's dealings with us. Only one course plain. Do the duty at hand. God will unroll the future in His own time.

2. From the Ethiopian learn—(*a*) **To prize our Bibles.** We have advantages he lacked. What puzzled him we understand. We have the light of the Gospel to interpret the prophecies. See that he puts us not to shame. Amid all our reading never neglect the Word of God. (*b*) **To be teachable.** God has given Christian parents, ministers, teachers, friends to explain His truth and show us how to serve Him. Be as attentive to them as the Ethiopian to Philip, and you shall not lose your reward.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Teachers will notice that v. 37 no longer appears in the Revised Version, and is not regarded in this lesson.

The chief points to impress on children are—1. God's living providence in preparing souls for receiving the Gospel—first the Samaritans and then the Ethiopian. Point out that this a step towards the wider ingathering of the Gentiles.

2. God's different ways of convincing. The Samaritans convinced by the help of miracle, the Ethiopian by the Gospel's correspondence with prophecy. But both arrived at the same conclusion, viz. that the Gospel as proclaimed by God's servant is His provision for their souls.

VII.—CONVERSION OF SAUL

37 A.D.

Acts viii. 1-3; ix. 1-22

Introduction.—We have now read of the Gospel preached to the Jews, to the Samaritans, and to the Ethiopian. But it must be preached far beyond Palestine, to heathen as well as to Jews, to Greek philosophers as well as to leaders of the synagogue. To-day we read of a man prepared by God to take the lead in that great work. Where have we seen Saul of Tarsus? At Stephen's murder (vii. 58). And now follows that up by a fierce attack on disciples at Jerusalem (viii. 3). In men's eyes no man less likely to be a Christian Apostle, but in God's sight 'a chosen vessel.' Consider now the Lord's preparation of Saul for the work appointed him.

I. **Saul's Early Training.**—Born at Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia; a Gentile city, but many Jews living there; of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. iii. 5). His father a Pharisee (xxiii. 6); enjoyed the rights of a Roman citizen (xxii. 28). Saul when a child would be taught at home the Old Testament stories we all know,—Abraham and Isaac, Joseph and his brethren, Moses, David; also the Psalms and parts of the prophecies. At school he learned something of Greek wisdom and poetry. Was taught also the trade of a tent-maker, to sew haircloth and fit up posts and ropes. Why a trade? Not to be his calling through life, but because a wise Jewish custom required every boy to learn to win his bread with his hands. When a lad of twelve or thirteen went to Jerusalem to study the Jewish law under Gamaliel, a learned doctor or professor (xxii. 3). Became Gamaliel's best student (Gal. i. 14). Became also a keen Pharisee, eager to uphold the Jews' laws and customs, and the power of the chief priests. Now about thirty years old. Held in great respect for learning and character. Probably one of the Sanhedrin or Great Council. Voted for Stephen's death (xxvi. 10). Daily growing more violent against the Church. Was Saul then a wicked man? Not exactly wicked, but in great error. He strove to do what he thought to be God's will. Strict in observing the law. Punctual in prayers and sacrifices. Of his violence he says, 'I thought within myself that I ought,' etc. (xxvi. 9). Many good qualities used in a wrong way. God now about to turn them to His own holy purpose.

II. **Saul arrested** (ix. 1-7).—See him now set forth on a six days' journey to Damascus with letters of authority from the high priest. Hoped to return with disciples of Jesus in chains (v. 2). But the Lord's hand was already upon him. How? **Conscience** gave him no rest (v. 5). Whenever he paused to think, Stephen's face and voice, and all his powerful words concerning Jesus of Nazareth; and Stephen's death, so cruel yet so triumphant, rose to mind. A terrible question. Could Stephen have been right? If so, what of Saul? Like the Jews at Pentecost (ii. 37), Saul 'pricked to the heart,' but, unlike them, he strove to put such thoughts from him and pushed on. Compared to an ox kicking against the driver's goad. So five days passed. On the sixth, at noon, Damascus in sight, the Eastern sun bright and glaring

overhead. Suddenly a light shone brighter than the sun, and the whole company fell to the earth. Soon the others rose, but Saul lay still. Why? Because he saw what they saw not—a vision of Jesus (v. 17; xxii. 14; xxvi. 19; 1 Cor. ix. 1; xv. 8). Also heard a Voice which to others seemed a mere sound (v. 4; xxvi. 14). Why did the Lord say '**me**'? Because **the Church is Christ's living body** (1 Cor. xii. 27; Eph. i. 22, 23). He who hurts the Church of believers hurts Jesus, its head. *Think. If we hate, or mock, or despise the humblest disciple because of his faith, we are doing so to the Lord Himself.* Saul did not at first understand the vision and the voice, but quickly convinced by the Lord's own words (v. 5). He now believed, but he had not yet the peace of believing. He showed his belief by ready obedience to the Lord's next words (vv. 6-8). Jesus had '**apprehended**' Saul by force, but did not *compel* him to believe. That of necessity left free, and no surer sign of true **faith** than **submission.** Meanwhile he is led helpless into the city, there to await the Lord's further commands.

III. **Saul in Darkness.**—See him now in the house of Judas for three days. Blind, and neither eating nor drinking. How occupied? Not with man, but with God and his own soul. (1) **He meditates** on the past, his early life, his late experience, the Holy Scriptures and the light now thrown on them. Two thoughts press heavily upon him. (*a*) Jesus of Nazareth, the despised of men, the crucified, whose disciples are slain and oppressed, is the Messiah. The Nazarenes' faith is true; Jesus lives and watches over His people. (*b*) His own conduct. How dreadful! Been fighting against God. Injuring His servants. In his anguish Saul thinks himself a great sinner. (2) **He prays** (v. 11). No idle dreaming; no formal words; but earnest wrestling of soul. Like the publican, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' (3) **He finds peace.** Not full at first, but real. The Lord comforted him by a vision (v. 12). Still bowed low under a sense of guilt, but not hopeless. His eyes still dark, but light begins to enter his soul (Gal. i. 11, 12).

IV. **Saul baptized.**—Saul granted a vision of Ananias; Ananias also given a command concerning Saul (vv. 10, 11). Ananias a Jew, but a disciple of Jesus; had heard of Saul's coming with dismay. Received the Lord's command with wonder (vv. 13, 14). How did the Lord give him confidence? Told him of the great work He had in store for Saul, and that Saul must be prepared to enter upon it (vv. 15, 16). And now Ananias goes without fear to the house in the street called Straight. There sat the persecutor blind, humble, helpless as a child. Saul felt a hand laid gently upon him, the touch of peace. A friendly voice spake, 'Brother Saul,' and delivered the Lord's message (v. 17). At once his eyes felt free as from scales, and looking up he beheld a countenance full of holy goodwill (xxii. 13). That loving hand and voice and look carried a new assurance of the Lord's forgiveness. *Friendly sympathy from a Christian a great help to belief in the gospel of God's love. Study to show kindness to any one sorry for a fault.* Then face to face Saul heard from Ananias how God had planned his life. '**Chosen him**' to '**know His will,**' '**to see that Just One,**' '**to hear the voice of His mouth**' (xxii. 14). And for what purpose (xxii. 15)? Meanwhile an important step to be taken (xxii. 16). What was the effect of Ananias' visit? Immediately Saul arose and was baptized. Hastened to join the band of disciples whom he had set out to persecute. In baptism

God gave Saul a seal—a renewed promise—of His pardon and grace, and Saul devoted himself wholly to the Lord. Henceforth the Lord's servant to live and die.

V. **Saul's First Days of Faith.**—Spent in quiet fellowship with the brethren at Damascus. No doubt consulted together, prayed together, partook together of the Sacrament of bread and wine in memory of the Lord's death and as a pledge of service. But Saul now full of the Holy Ghost. Refreshed and strengthened, he began to use his gifts in the Master's cause. Soon the Jews in their synagogue astonished to hear the scholar of Gamaliel preach the faith that once he destroyed, and prove from the Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth 'is the very Christ' (v. 22).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Learn here the power of God's grace.**—No one more opposed to the Gospel than Saul, yet by grace Saul became a disciple (1 Cor. xv. 10). Are your hearts cold towards Jesus Christ? He seeks to change them by the Spirit. Have you been active in wrong-doing? Perhaps ill-treating, mocking some disciple of Jesus? Ask Jesus for pardon and grace, and He will hear you.

2. **God has a place and work for every one of us according to the powers and opportunities He has given.**—Though we have not Saul's talents, we are 'chosen vessels' in our smaller way. Do you wish to know if you are faithful disciples? if you answer to the call of God? Think. Do you ask, like Saul, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' When sure of the Master's will, are you earnest to do it?

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It is wrong to dwell on Saul's errors before conversion, as if he were a reprobate and evil liver. Make much rather of his high qualities—honesty, virtue, conscientiousness, zeal,—all good gifts from God. Then show with the greater force how unavailing these were until devoted to the Lord's service. Saul's conversion was the spiritual enlightenment of a good man in darkness, not the moral reform of a bad one. Show that conscientiousness therefore, though worthy of respect, is not enough. There must be light from God, and the renewal of the heart by His Spirit.

VIII.—PETER AND CORNELIUS

40 A.D.

Acts x.

Read in class vv. 1-18, 34-48

Introduction.—In last lesson we read how the Lord chose Saul of Tarsus to carry the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles (ix. 15). Meanwhile the glad tidings were spreading fast. At Antioch, a large city in Syria, many Gentiles had turned to the Lord through the preaching of disciples who had fled from persecution (viii. 4; xi. 20, 21). On every side signs that a religion for all mankind had been revealed. But the Apostles and chief disciples at Jerusalem did not understand this. Why? Had not the Master commanded them to make disciples of all nations? Yes; but they thought that a Gentile, before he could be a disciple of Jesus, must first become a Jew—a proselyte—and observe the ceremonies of the law of Moses. Why did they suppose this? Because nearly two thousand years ago God had called Abraham out of Chaldæa to live in Canaan and be the father of His peculiar people, and ever since God had kept the Jewish people apart from the rest of mankind. The Jews despised Gentile ignorance. The Gentiles hated Jewish pride. But now the time had come when Jew and Gentile should no longer stand apart. Jesus had taken away the barrier. Not the sons of Abraham by blood, but those who believed in God, and obeyed Him as Abraham did, were now to be counted true children of Abraham, the father of the faithful. To-day we learn how God prepared a Gentile soul to receive the Gospel, and a Jewish Apostle to declare it to him.

I. **Cornelius, the devout Soldier.**—A Roman centurion, not very high in rank but of an honourable name, well known in his nation's history, commanded one hundred soldiers of a regiment of Italians. Brought up a heathen, but, like the other centurion we read of (Matt. viii.), an honest, good-hearted man. Had studied the Jews' religion while stationed among them, and saw how good it was if truly followed. Had put away idols and worshipped the true God, though he remained a Gentile. Showed that his godliness was sincere because—

1. **He taught the truth to his household and some of his soldiers.** A sure sign of an earnest heart, that he seeks others to share his blessing.

2. **He was kind and generous** to the poor Jews around him. Proud and unruly as they were, he did not take offence but pitied them and desired their good.

3. **He was diligent in prayer.** 'Prayed to God alway.' In prayer asked for more light (xi. 14). Felt that he knew very little, and there was very much to be known. Neither alms nor prayers could satisfy his soul.

II. **A Twofold Preparation.—How was Cornelius prepared to receive the Gospel?** As he prayed at the ninth hour—three in the afternoon—an angel messenger appeared with good tidings—a great honour conferred on God's most favoured servants (v. 3).

What were the tidings? (*a*) That his prayer was heard and his generous kindness observed and accepted by God (vv. 4-31). (*b*) That he must send now to Joppa, thirty miles off, and bring thence Simon Peter, who should teach him the way of salvation he so longed to know (vv. 5, 6, 32). How did Cornelius show his faith in this message?

1. **By giving orders at once to three good men to go to Joppa.** Cornelius trained to prompt obedience, and therefore followed the angel's directions without hesitation. A good soldier makes a good disciple.

2. **By telling them all that had happened to him.** He had no fear that he was under a dream or mere fancy; convinced that it was all real and of God.

3. **He called his friends and relatives together** next day to receive Simon Peter, and hear the great tidings of salvation he bore from the Lord. All these signs of true and strong faith that God loves to see in His servants.

How was Simon Peter prepared to declare the Gospel? As he prayed at noon on the flat roof of the house of Simon the tanner, he grew faint with hunger, and fell into a trance or dream. What did God show Peter in the dream (vv. 11-13)? Why did he in his dream refuse to eat? Because, as we have seen, only certain animals counted clean by the law of Moses, and he dared eat none other. Why could he not have taken the clean and left the unclean? Because the unclean touching the clean defiled the whole. What did the voice answer (v. 15)? God, not man, had made the separation between clean and unclean, and God could remove it. Did Peter understand the vision? Not at first. Knew neither what it meant nor why God had sent it. How did he get light?

1. **By a further message from God the Spirit in his heart,** easily understood and obeyed (vv. 19-21).

2. **By the words of Cornelius's servants,** that he could not help connecting with the vision (v. 22). Strange news for a Jew to hear that God's angel had appeared to a Gentile, one of the Roman conquerors, and that he, the Jewish Apostle, was required to speak 'words' to him.

3. **By reflection.**—As next day he travelled along the coast with the three Gentile messengers and six Jewish brethren, the meaning of it all came clearly to Peter's mind. He saw now that the great sheet meant the human race. The clean, the chosen people Israel; the unclean, the Gentiles. As God had cleansed the unclean in the vision, so had He chosen the Gentiles to share the blessings of His grace.

III. **A Memorable Meeting.**—When both the teacher and the learners of God's truth prepared by faith and prayer, a rich blessing follows. So was it now in the house of Cornelius (v. 33). In this meeting observe—

1. **All pride absent.**—Cornelius, the Roman officer, did reverence to the humble Galilean as God's servant. Simon Peter, the Jew, the Apostle of God, forbade that reverence from the Gentile. Met on equal terms. Man to man before God.

2. **Perfect frankness.**—Cornelius told his story openly before the meeting (vv. 30-33). Peter declared that God had just taught him also a new lesson (v. 28).

3. **Peter's solemn conviction** (vv. 34, 35).—A great and wonderful

truth for a Jew to receive. What does it mean? Not that devout and good men are accepted for their works—or without Jesus. In that case Peter's present errand were unnecessary. But that God looks with favour upon all good men, whether Jew or Gentile, and accepts them for Jesus' sake. Cornelius's faith and works rewarded by the knowledge of Jesus, for

4. **Peter went on to explain *how* accepted of God.**—Preached the Gospel (vv. 36-44). Told the story he had repeated so often with saving power. What does he call it? 'Peace by Jesus Christ'; peace between Jew and Gentile—no more barriers of race between God and man—no more barriers of sin and condemnation. While Peter spake, the Holy Ghost wrought with power. The Gospel story, already known to some present (v. 37), struck all hearts with new power; and when at last Peter proclaimed, '*Whosoever* believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins' (v. 43), attention grew to joyful faith. All at once we see those Gentiles burst forth like the Jewish disciples at Pentecost (ii. 4), praising God in many tongues (vv. 45, 46).

IV. **The Result of the Meeting.**—1. The Jewish Christians present astonished; then convinced that the Gospel free to all, and that the Gentiles could be disciples without becoming Jews. All alike sinners, all need salvation, for all salvation provided in Jesus Christ.

2. Peter pointed out the Church's duty (vv. 47, 48). God had given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit's gifts. It were sin then to keep them from fellowship. There was but one Lord, one faith, one baptism. In the world's eye conquerors and conquered, Jew and Gentile. To the eye of faith no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God (Eph. ii. 19).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Be careful to prepare your hearts to hear the Gospel.**—Come to church and Sunday School waiting and wishing to be taught. When you enter church ask for God's blessing, and then expect to receive it.

2. **Learn to look down on no one.**—God has made some separations in the world, but boys and girls are apt to make further separations among themselves, and try to look down on others, or look at some with envy and spite. Learn from Peter and Cornelius a lesson of frank goodwill to all. The rich have much to learn from the poor, the clever from the dull, the strong from the weak. Let each remember that God loves all.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The main thing to inculcate in this lesson is the breadth of the Christian spirit. The reward of devotion both to Peter and Cornelius was the enlargement of their hearts and the opening up of a wider range for their love and fellowship. A good blow can here be given to 'sets,' 'cliques,' and all the little exclusive devices that even young children are found practising.

IX.—PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON

44 A.D.

Acts xii. 1-17

Introduction.—Three years elapsed since the event we read of last Sunday. During that time the fellowship of the Gentiles in Christ admitted by the leaders of the Church, after they heard Peter's experience at Joppa, though not by all Jewish believers. The Church at Antioch increased greatly both in Jews and Gentiles, and become a centre of the faith. Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus among its leaders. Of this we shall read again. The disciples there had come to be called **Christians**, not in respect but in mockery; then a nickname though now so honourable; just as the cross, once held as shameful as our gallows, now the most sacred of emblems. The love of God in Christ has sanctified both. A famine had broken out in Judæa, and relief sent from Antioch to the poor disciples at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. For some time things had been quiet at Jerusalem, and the Church grown and confirmed, but now we see signs of trouble.

I. **A New Persecution.**—A Jewish ruler over Palestine under Rome. Grandson of Herod the Great, the murderer of innocents (Matt. ii. 16). Nephew of Herod Antipas, murderer of the Baptist (Mark vi. 27). As cruel as either of these. Sought to show zeal for the law by persecuting the Church. Beheaded James, brother of John, the son of Zebedee—first apostolic martyr. What did Jesus once say to those brothers (Matt. xx. 23)? The saying now fulfilled. In James, by early martyr death. In John, by long life of faithful and trying service. The Lord's cup is drunk in life as well as by death, wherever faithful disciples take up the cross and follow Him. The Jews delighted with Herod's cruelty, so he resolved to repeat it. An easy way to be popular. This time seized Peter, the foremost Apostle (v. 3). Why did Herod delay Peter's death? Because now the Passover week; would wait till the great day over. [*Easter* (v. 4) *stands for the Passover.*] Then would show him to the crowd and have him executed. Sure thus to win praise. Pharisee and Sadducee now hated the disciples of Jesus more than ever.

II. **Herod the Tyrant and Peter the Apostle.**—A striking contrast. 1. **See King Herod. How powerful!**—the friend and old playfellow of Cæsar, on the throne of all Palestine, with dominions beyond, rich, able, many guards and soldiers to do his bidding, wielding powers of life and death, popular with the Jewish priests and people; yet **how weak** in spite of his power, for—(*a*) **Herod's character** bad; cruel, corrupt, unjust; full of vanity, without self-control; had no fellowship with God, the source of strength. (*b*) **Herod's cause** bad. The declared mortal enemy of Christ's disciples; endeavouring to stamp out the Gospel, therefore at war with almighty God. To the eye of faith Herod's aims hopeless and wicked, and himself of no account.

2. **See St. Peter. How helpless!**—a poor Galilean disciple; no doubt possessed of gifts of the Spirit, but little opportunity of using these

now. In Herod's prison—probably a strong room in his palace. Four quaternions, *i.e.* sixteen soldiers, charged to guard him. Four men always on duty; two chained to the prisoner, one at the cell door, and one guarding the gate outside. On the morrow the prospect of a violent death. In the power of a tyrant who knows no mercy. Yet is Peter helpless? No, for—

(*a*) **His cause good.**—The Apostle and faithful servant of Jesus, and to whom belongs 'all power in heaven and on earth' (Matt. xxviii.)

(*b*) **His character good.**—His soul at peace and without fear—strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

(*c*) **The Church continually at prayer for him.**—Knew not whether it was the Lord's will to have Peter depart like James and Stephen or be restored to them again; but knew that 'men ought always to pray and not to faint' (Luke xviii. 1). Remembered, too, the Master's promise, 'If two of you shall agree,' etc. (Matt. xviii. 19). And also, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do,' etc. (John xiv. 13, 14). Knew, too, that prayer in the Master's name must be offered in His spirit—the spirit of humble trust and submission—'not My will, but Thine, be done' (Luke xxii. 42). In such prayers there was great power. To the eye of faith Peter's position as strong as that of Herod weak.

III. **Peter's Deliverance** (vv. 7-11).—This time it pleased the Lord to rescue His servant from the oppressor. By what means (v. 7)? What is 'the angel of the Lord'? Sometimes in the Old Testament believed to be our Lord Himself. Here a ministering spirit (Heb. i. 14). One of many thousands that do the Lord's bidding continually in heaven and on earth (Ps. ciii. 20, 21). In this deliverance let us observe—

1. **How vain the tyrant's power.**—Once God willed to free His servant, soldiers, fetters, bolts, bars, massive gates, high walls—all of no avail whatever. So when God sets free a penitent and believing soul from the bondage of sin, not all the power and devices of the Evil One can keep that soul captive (John x. 27, 28).

2. **With what ease the angel carries out his commission.**—Even Peter himself not fully aroused. No noise of breaking fetters and bursting doors; no alarm of overpowered sentinels. At the angel of the Lord's silent bidding obstacles melt away like ice in spring.

3. **Peter's obedience.**—He was called to do what he could. At the angel's bidding, rose up, put on his outer garment, followed his guide. All tokens of faith and obedience. These acts could not have set him free, nay, *alone* he could not have done them; but they were made possible, and then his freedom depended upon him doing them readily. So with all the Lord's deliverances. From all of us He asks for obedient trust, having given us One to trust in. No soul saved from sin and death against his own will or without faith and obedience, according to the light given to him. Observe, too, that Peter was beyond pursuit before he understood clearly what had happened (v. 11). Only knew enough to trust and obey. So we can be saved by Jesus before we understand the whole way of salvation. Let the youngest and the most simple-minded follow our heavenly Guide, and they will come to see more clearly that 'He leads them forth by the right way' (Ps. cvii. 7).

IV. **In Mary's House.**—Mary, the sister, or perhaps the aunt, of

Barnabas. A Christian woman; gave the use of her house to the Church. Now a late meeting for prayer. All in great anxiety on account of Peter. Know that it may be his last night on earth. Have no earthly help; no influence with Herod, or the priests, or officers, or great men. Their one refuge—God; their one comfort—prayer. Knew that the Lord *could* succour Peter still. Know not *if* or *how* He *would* do so. Suddenly a knock heard. Too dangerous to open door at once. Rhoda (Rose), a damsel, went to inquire who is there (v. 13). In a moment back with wonderful tidings (v. 14). Did the brethren believe her words? Thought it too good news to be true. First declared her mad; then that it must be 'his angel,' from Jews' belief that a guardian angel attends every man. Considered it more unlikely that Peter free than that the girl mistaken. Possibly Peter already dead. This doubt continued until, when the door opened, Peter himself, by presence, gesture, and speech, convinced them that it was he. Was this unbelief *sinful*? It was a sign of weakness. Like the Apostles' marvelling sometimes at the Lord's wonders, it was 'beyond measure' (Mark vi. 51, 52). Ought to have been prepared for God's answer in *any* form. Knew that He would grant either what they asked or something better (Eph. iii. 20).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Keep in mind the presence of God's angels with us.**—They are but His messengers and servants; we cannot see or hear them. It is wrong to pray to them, or call upon them; but it is pleasant and comforting to think of them near us, rejoicing over every penitent sinner, and ministering to every saint of God. God has not revealed their presence without a gracious purpose. How often, all unknown to us, may they have kept deadly evil from working our ruin!

2. **Learn from Peter to respond readily when the Lord calls us.**—Let us arise; gird ourselves; put on the whole armour of God; go forth after our heavenly Leader, the Captain of our salvation; cease not from following Him until sin's bondage is far behind us, and we have entered on the rest and safety that remain for His faithful servants.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In this lesson dwell on the delusive strength of a bad man—really weak, however mighty; and the real strength of a man of God, however humble, because he is joined to Omnipotence. The ministry of angels is a highly interesting subject, and must be referred to briefly, though it would require a full lesson to deal with it thoroughly. In enforcing the power of believing prayer from this passage, it will be well to point out that faith to pray is only one side of faith in prayer. There must also be faith to watch with confidence for the answer God sends. And that is too often neglected, even by the devout.

X.—PAUL AND BARNABAS SENT ON A MISSIONARY JOURNEY

47-50 A.D.

Acts xiii. 1-14, 49-52; xiv.

Read in class Acts xiii. 1-14; xiv. 8-20

Introduction.—What is a missionary? One sent. By whom are Christian missionaries sent? (1) By the Lord Jesus, through the working of God the Holy Ghost. (2) By the Church, their brethren. For what purpose? To teach the Gospel to those who do not know it.

I. **The Missionaries.**—Antioch, in Syria, now the centre of mission work, while Jerusalem remained the headquarters of the Church. Antioch a busy city on the river Orontes, sixteen miles from Seleucia, its sea-port. Full of men of all nations, east and west. Among leaders of Church at Antioch two we have read of before. (1) **Barnabas,** the son of consolation, the generous man who sold his land to support the Church (iv. 36). Afterwards we read of him introducing Saul to the disciples at Jerusalem when they dreaded to receive him (ix. 27), encouraging the young Church at Antioch and bringing Saul thither from Tarsus (xi. 23-26). Again, bearing relief from Antioch to the poor brethren at Jerusalem (xi. 30). Always the same kindly, large-hearted disciple. (2) **Saul of Tarsus** not yet an Apostle, now a prophet or inspired preacher. About ten years since his conversion. During that time God had been preparing Saul for the special service required of him. In Arabia he spent nearly three years in meditation and prayer (Gal. i. 17, 18). Saul now well known to the Church; hated by the Jews as a traitor, much as he loved his nation (Rom. ix. 3). Trained to hardship, toil, and danger. Among Jews and Gentiles a practised defender of the Gospel. No longer a self-willed Pharisee, but an enthusiastic, loving disciple. God's preparation complete. Saul's mission about to begin.

II. **The Missionaries ordained.**—In this first heathen mission observe four things. (1) **The Holy Ghost commanded it.** The Lord Jesus made known His will by God the Spirit, perhaps through a prophet. (2) **He chose Barnabas and Saul, two of the best men in the Church.** The great work of missions worthy of the Church's best. We send our bravest soldiers to difficult foreign service. (3) **The Holy Ghost had already called those disciples, but that not enough.** The Church must separate them. Missionaries represent man as well as God. (4) **The Church of Antioch an earnest and devout Church.** A dull, idle Church not so honoured. They 'ministered to the Lord,' *i.e.* held frequent services of worship, 'and fasted,' a common habit at special times of prayer (v. 2). The Church asking the Lord's counsel and direction when this command given. Soon a great meeting. Barnabas and Saul ordained by prayer and the laying on of brethren's hands. Then a solemn and loving farewell (v. 3). Barnabas and Saul now Apostles. What is their commission? To preach to 'the Jew first, and also to the Greek' (Rom. i. 16).

III. **The Missionaries at Cyprus** (vv. 4-12).—See the two Apostles, with John, surnamed Mark, to assist them, start on their journey. The whole world before them. A great harvest field to be reaped for the

Master (see Lesson I.) Where first? As they go down the river to Seleucia the mountains of Cyprus rise in view. Barnabas's native place. Resolve to begin there. At Paphos, the capital, Sergius Paulus was deputy or governor under the Roman senate. 'A prudent man.' Not devout, like Cornelius, but anxious to learn. Heard of the Apostles and wished to hear the Gospel (v. 7). What difficulty arose? Elymas, a conjurer, like Simon Magus (viii. 9), lived at Paphos. Had gained influence with the governor by his tricks. Feared to lose it, so opposed the Apostles and tried to prevent Sergius Paulus from believing their message (v. 8). What did Saul call Elymas (v. 10)? Why such terrible language? Because Elymas was serving Satan. (1) By teaching falsehood and practising deceit. (2) By trying to come between a soul and the Saviour—a true work of Satan.

Now Saul utters a stern judgment (v. 11). Was this cruel and harsh? No; for—(1) It was **God's act.** Saul only an instrument. The Holy Ghost prompted the words (v. 9), and gave them power (v. 11). (2) The judgment only 'for a season.' No more cruel than Saul's own blindness at Damascus (ix. 8, 9). Elymas received a merciful check in his wickedness, and an opportunity to repent. (3) It was the means of bringing Sergius Paulus to believe. A righteous judgment leading to a soul's salvation.

At Paphos **Saul's** name altered to **Paul,** a name better understood among the Gentiles, whom he sought to win for Christ. Willing to become all things to all men (1 Cor. ix. 22).

IV. **The Missionaries leave Cyprus for Antioch in Pisidia.**—Leaving Paphos, the three missionaries crossed the sea to Perga in Pamphylia (v. 13). Before them now a wild mountain journey across the Taurus range. Peril from floods and robbers, and beyond certain trouble from Jews and heathen. How do they face the prospect? Barnabas and Paul veteran soldiers of the cross. The greatest peril only fixes the eye of faith more steadily on the Master, and courage rises. But John Mark a raw recruit. Meant well, but had not counted the cost, and forgot the Lord's presence when he should not. Lost heart and turned homewards to his mother (v. 13; xii. 12). Soon Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia. A large Gentile city with a colony of Jews. Whither do the Apostles resort? To the synagogue—the Jews' place of worship. Their message to the Jews first. Their preaching like that of Stephen (vii.) Building upon the foundation of the law and the prophets, proved how Jesus the promised Messiah. But at Antioch they also proclaimed 'salvation unto the ends of the earth' (v. 47). How was their message received? Some of the Gentiles believed and rejoiced. But the Jews raised a persecution against the Apostles, and compelled them to depart from the city (v. 50)—*coasts* here means *boundaries.* Were the brethren at Antioch cast down at this persecution? Not at all. Too joyful at the glad tidings of salvation and the signs of the Lord's presence amongst them (v. 52).

V. **At Iconium.**—Arrived from Antioch. Still to the Jew first (xiv. 1). Was their reception better here? At first it was. Many converts, both Jews and Gentiles. A long time of success and blessing (v. 3). How interrupted? (1) By unbelieving Jews speaking evil against them to the Gentiles. The Apostles' own nation always their most bitter foes. (2) By

a division thus arising regarding them, just as in our Lord's own ministry (John vii. 12). (3) By a combined attack of violent men of both races, Jew stirring up heathen to turn from the Lord. What counsel had the Lord given for such a case (Matt. x. 23)?

VI. **At Derbe and Lystra** (vv. 6-20).—Lystra a small town in a remote region. Few Jews. No synagogue. People sunk in idolatry and easily led. This visit remarkable for—(1) After preaching the Gospel, Paul healed a cripple who believed his message (vv. 9, 10). (2) This miracle caused the heathen to declare Barnabas to be Jupiter, the chief of the gods, and Paul, Mercury, the messenger and speaker. All spoken in the country dialect, which the Apostle did not understand. Presently they beheld a procession halt at their door—priests, oxen, wreaths, a sacrifice about to take place in their honour. Horrified, they rushed out, and with difficulty stopped the ceremony. What did they preach? The idolaters had no Bible like the Jews; the Apostles therefore opened God's other book—the book of Nature. Showed the goodness and love revealed there (v. 17), and the folly of idolatry (v. 15). The God of providence also the God of grace. (3) The men of Lystra perverted and misled. By whom (v. 19)? Yesterday Paul worshipped, to-day stoned and left for dead. How restored? Perhaps a miracle. Perhaps only stunned, and reviving, able to return, bruised and bleeding, to Lystra, and next day to move on to Derbe (v. 20). Paul's spirit indomitable. In either case spared by God's mercy.

VII. **See now the devoted Courage of the two Apostles.**—Instead of continuing eastwards to their home at Antioch in Syria, **turned back again to face the perils just escaped.** Would not leave the newly-planted Churches so soon unvisited (vv. 21-24). Elders, *i.e.* pastors, ordained, counsel imparted, faith and courage confirmed; most of all by the Apostles' own heroic example. At last turned their faces homewards. A short voyage, a happy meeting, a wonderful story of daring and suffering, of God's mighty works done through His servants. The Gospel call to the Gentiles now more confirmed than ever (vv. 26-28).

PRACTICAL LESSON

Never forget our missionary duties. Those early travels and sufferings told for our learning. We can all be missionaries at home by living lives of faith and recommending the Gospel. But we are called to take interest in missions abroad as well. Young and old can be of use here. (1) **By thinking with attention and goodwill of the work we hear of taking place in heathen lands.** Too many regard it with indifference. (2) **By praying for its success,** and in our prayers **remembering places and missionaries** we know about. (3) **By subscribing as much as we can to support the cause.** Remember our Master gave *Himself* for us, and He seeks us to spread everywhere the knowledge of His love.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In teaching this lesson and the following ones, a large map ought to be used. It is essential for interest, attention, and sound instruction. This lesson may be too long for thorough treatment in class. In that case, the teacher ought to run briefly over the places visited, and dwell mainly on paragraphs I., III., V., and the Practical Lesson. The Apostles' method with Jews and Gentiles respectively should be distinctly pointed out.

XI.—PAUL AND SILAS GO ON ANOTHER JOURNEY

51 A.D.

Acts xv. 36–xvi. 15

Introduction.—At the close of last lesson we saw Paul and Barnabas return from the first mission journey. Had been absent for about three years. Brought great tidings of the Lord's work through them, and Churches planted in many cities; also that heathen as freely as Jews had received grace to believe (xiv. 27). The Apostles now at Antioch. But could Paul and Barnabas remain there? No. Their proper work among the heathen. Which of them proposed to depart (v. 36)? Paul anxious for the welfare of the young Churches, and also to tell the message of liberty from Jerusalem. To-day we consider the beginning of **Paul's second mission journey.**

I. **A Dispute and Separation** (vv. 37-41).—You remember how John, surnamed Mark, behaved on the first journey (xiii. 13). Now at Antioch, ashamed and anxious to try again. **Barnabas** his uncle willing to take him (v. 37). Always full of kindness, anxious to make every allowance. Had once smoothed the way in the Church for a penitent persecutor. Who (ix. 26, 27)? But **Paul** full of stern zeal. What did he think (v. 38)? Their work too serious to be hindered by faint hearts. Each insisted; neither would give way. A sharp quarrel, and they part in 'contention.' Which was to blame? Very likely both. Meanwhile God brought good out of evil. Two streams of living water now flowed to the heathen world instead of one. Barnabas and Mark crossed the sea to Cyprus, where both well known (v. 39). Paul and Silas crossed the mountains through Syria to Paul's native Cilicia (v. 41); went from city to city encouraging the Churches. Many of them, no doubt, planted by Paul in former years (ix. 30; xi. 25).

II. **A new Missionary.**—To fill the place of Mark, Paul found a disciple at Lystra. Converted no doubt at Paul's former visit. **Timotheus or Timothy** a youth. Twenty years later Paul wrote to him as a young man (1 Tim. iv. 12). **Timothy's preparation for the work of a missionary.** (1) **His upbringing.** He had a pious home. His mother and grandmother loved the Lord. A Christian example always before him (2 Tim. i. 5). His father a heathen, only mentioned once; seems to have died before this time. (2) **His instruction.** Had been carefully taught the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. iii. 14, 15). Able, therefore, to teach the Gospel to Jew as well as Gentile. (3) **His character.** Had a sincere and loving nature. Won the Apostle's warm regard. What does Paul call him (1 Tim. i. 2)? Of good name among the brethren (xvi. 2). Because his mother a Jewess, Timothy joined the Jewish Church by Paul's advice, to silence murmurers (v. 3). (4) **His ordination.** Set apart at Lystra for the ministry, as Paul himself had been at Antioch (xiii. 3), by the laying on of hands by the Presbytery or ministers (here called elders) of the Church (1 Tim. iv. 14). Received gifts from the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. i. 6). Thus well prepared, went forth with Paul and became one of his

dearest friends and helpers. We shall learn more of Timothy in other lessons.

III. **Detained in Galatia** (xvi. 4-6).—Paul, Silas, and Timothy travelled first through the cities where the Church already planted, viz. Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia, perhaps Perga. For what purpose? To give the Gentile brethren the message of liberty from Jerusalem (Acts xv. 27-29). With what result? Great joy; and many more Gentiles joined the Church. A free gospel truly glad tidings Next they pushed northward to Phrygia and Galatia, where the people still heathen. In Galatia we learn from Paul's letter to the Galatians that he stayed a long time because of illness. We do not know what was the matter, but something very painful to the sufferer and unpleasant to see. How did the Galatians receive the sick Apostle? Kind, warm-hearted people of the same race as our Highlanders and the Irish. Welcomed the missionaries. Treated the sick Apostle hospitably, and when they saw him anxious for their good grew to love him with all their hearts (Gal. iv. 15). Better still, learned to believe the Gospel and love the Lord Jesus. Put away idols, were baptized, formed several congregations, full of enthusiasm and gladness. A delightful beginning. We shall see afterwards how it fared with them.

IV. **The Man of Macedonia.**—After a time Paul recovered, and left Galatia with Silas and Timothy. First turned **southwards** towards Asia and its capital Ephesus. [*Observe Asia here not the great continent we know as Asia, or even Asia Minor, but one province in the west of Asia Minor.*] How checked (v. 6)? Probably the Spirit spoke by a vision, or through an inspired preacher. Next turned **northwards** towards Bithynia, a wild country of heathen. Again stopped (v. 7). Only one way of advance remained—**westwards.** Soon reached Troas, an ancient city on the sea-coast. Opposite lay the islands of Greece and the distant shores of Europe. No doubt Paul wondered now if his work for Christ lay there. How directed (v. 9)? How did Paul know this man to be of Macedonia? From his dress and appearance; also from his cry. What help did the man seek? The only help Paul was appointed to convey,—the light of the Gospel. This man of Macedonia represented the heathen of all Europe. What was the condition of **Greece** and **Rome** (see Lesson I.)? What of **Northern Europe?** Altogether savage. Little better than Central Africa to-day. Hearts sore and unsatisfied. Lacked the one thing needful. All stood in the person of that man of Macedonia, and cried, **Come over and help us!**

V. **The Missionaries land in Europe.**—Paul now understood God's purpose in guiding him westwards (v. 10). The missionaries set sail from Troas. How many now? Paul, Silas, Timothy, and **Luke.** How do we know of Luke? Observe 'we' in v. 10. And we know that Luke wrote this book of God's Word. Who was Luke (Col. iv. 14)? A learned and skilful man and a faithful disciple (2 Tim. iv. 11). Joined the mission party at Troas probably to attend to Paul's health. Served the Lord by keeping His Apostle in condition to preach the Gospel.

A short voyage and the missionaries land at **Neapolis.** Thence to **Philippi** (v. 12). What was a colony? Under the Roman Empire a colony not a settlement like Canada or Australia, but a military station more like

Gibraltar or Malta. At Philippi lived soldiers with their families, some Greek citizens, and a few Jews in business. All in command of two chief officers, who went about guarded, each by twelve men called lictors armed with a bundle of rods and an axe in the centre. Stern in punishing disorder.

VI. **The Word preached at Philippi.**—To the Jew first. No synagogue. Only a small unroofed enclosure by the river-side, where a few Jews came to pray. Here Paul preached on the Sabbath. Who was the first convert made in Europe (v. 14)? Observe—(1) The Lord by His Spirit opened Lydia's heart. Made it an honest and good heart. She might have resisted the work of the Spirit, but she yielded to His promptings. (2) The word spoken by Paul was not, therefore, caught away by idle thoughts or choked by cares of business, but was heard and understood and bore fruit in Lydia's conversion to Christ (Matt. xiii. 18-23). What signs of conversion did Lydia give? (1) Confessed her faith. Joined the Church of Christ by baptism. (2) Brought her household into the fold; probably both children and servants. (3) Showed kindness to the Lord's servants. Paul always willing to be independent of those to whom he preached, but Lydia 'constrained' him to lodge with her. Thought it an honour to use her house for the Lord's service.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Take example from Timothy.** Be diligent to study the Word of God and follow the Lord Jesus when you are young. Then you will be ready for whatever further call of service God may send you. Timothy without knowing it was preparing for the high position of St. Paul's chosen friend and comrade. Afterwards to be head of the Church at Ephesus. You may not be called to a high position. But God certainly has some work in store for you in His Church that you will be able to do well, only if you use your present advantages.

2. **Can we do nothing to spread the Gospel among the heathen?** Think how the heathen nations at this hour in Africa, in Asia, and other lands are yearning unconsciously for the Gospel, and calling to us, **Come over and help us.** You can help by your prayers to God for them; and if you pray for them you will be ready to give at least the little which is in your power to send missionaries to them.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In preparing this lesson the teacher will do well to read attentively the passages in the Epistles to the Galatians and Timothy bearing upon our subject. It is impossible in the limits of this lesson to deal also with Paul's reproof to Peter, described in Gal. ii. 14, but it may be referred to incidentally. With young classes the first three paragraphs may be gone over rapidly and the vision at Troas and the introduction of the Gospel into Europe dwelt upon at more length.

XII.—PAUL AND SILAS AT PHILIPPI

51, 52 A.D.

Acts xvi. 16-40

Read in class vv. 16-40

Introduction.—In last lesson we read of the first convert made in Europe—a Jewess (vv. 14, 15). Showed her love for the Gospel cause by ministering to the Lord's servants just as holy women once ministered to the Master Himself (Luke viii. 3). A congregation of believers soon gathered at Philippi, and met in Lydia's house (v. 40) and at the place of prayer beside the river (v. 16). The Church grew and flourished in quietness. Was this peace to last? No; the enemies of the Gospel ever active. Formerly we have seen the world, the flesh, and the devil act through the hatred of the Jews, while the Gentiles received the truth willingly. At Philippi the Jews received the truth, while its enemies wrought through the errors of the heathen. To-day we consider—(1) **the Gospel cause opposed by the powers of heathenism**; (2) **the Gospel cause honoured of God.**

I. **How did the powers of evil oppose the Gospel?**—1. **By the ravings of a slave girl possessed of a devil.**—This poor girl under the influence of what was called a spirit of Python, ascribed by heathen to their false god Apollo. This evil spirit caused her to shout aloud in the streets, and utter strange, wild, and sometimes clever sayings in answer to questions. Her owners, instead of pitying her affliction, made money of it by causing her to tell fortunes and answer puzzling questions for hire.

How did she treat the missionaries (v. 17)? Like the evil spirits who knew the Lord Jesus and cried out (Mark i. 24, 25), this one recognised the Lord's servants. Why was Paul *grieved*? why not willing to have his mission announced in this manner? (1) Paul vexed at the sad state of the girl, subject to an evil spirit and greedy masters; her cries no joyful announcement of good tidings, but the ravings of insanity. (2) Paul considered that such public notice dishonoured the Gospel; his Master's cause no fit subject for a soothsayer's cries (Mark iii. 11, 12). (3) Paul desired no help from the powers of evil; he was their sworn foe. Therefore, in his Master's name, Paul cast out the evil spirit (v. 18).

2. **By the anger of the girl's masters.**—Why angry (v. 19)? As long as the Gospel did not cause them loss, they paid no heed to it; allowed their slave to follow the missionaries daily. But now Paul had destroyed their gains; they think nothing of the girl's affliction, feel only rage and grief at her recovery. Regard the Gospel and its preachers as enemies; the selfish spirit of the world rules them. How did they treat Paul and Silas (v. 19)? No crime to cast out a devil, therefore they had to find another plea. What (vv. 20, 21)? (*a*) 'Trouble the city,' (*b*) 'Teach unlawful customs.' The first charge false, the second partly true, for Roman magistrates always jealous of new teachers lest they should cause disorder.

3. **By the unjust violence of the magistrates.**—Those two men—called prætors—were appointed to give justice; 'A terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well.'

But now the heathen mob were roused against the disciples. Instead of quieting the tumult till the case was tried, the prætors encouraged it. Perhaps afraid to offend the excited crowd. The lictors (guards) were ordered to seize Paul and Silas; the bundles of rods unbound; the disciples roughly stripped of their clothes and beaten with cruel stripes. Then, bruised and bleeding, handed over to the jailer for safe custody till the magistrates should decide what to do with them.

4. **By the cruelty of the jailer.**—A rough soldier like those who once ill-treated the Lord Jesus (John xix. 2, 3); despised the Jews; regarded Paul and Silas as two wandering preachers; probably anxious to stir up rebellion; therefore had no mercy. Thrust them into the deepest dungeon. Not like our jails, but below ground, damp, gloomy, and unwholesome. Fastened their feet in the stocks, an instrument as much for torture as safe-keeping. How dreadful the disciples' condition! Away from friends, sore wounded, unpitied, unrelieved, fastened up in a dismal den like wild beasts, suffering agony; and all without trial or justice, for no evil-doing, but for an act of mercy done in Christ's name for Christ's sake. How did Paul write of this time (1 Thess. ii. 2)? **Such the opposition of the powers of evil to the Gospel cause.** But the Lord's servants, though persecuted, were not forsaken.

II. **How did the Lord honour His Cause?**—1. **By the cure of the slave girl,** as we have already seen. Fulfilled the promise, Mark xvi. 17; fulfilled also in St. Peter (Acts v. 16).

2. **By the disciples' patience under persecution.**—Received grace. Endured wrong rather than show violence; considered the Gospel cause would thus be best advanced. Like the Master, 'oppressed and afflicted, yet opened not His mouth' (Isa. liii. 7).

3. **By their conduct in prison.**—Well might Paul and Silas have felt cast down; but did they? Not at all. Unable to sleep from smarting wounds, how did they spend the night? Weeping? complaining of wrong? calling for God's vengeance on their persecutors? None of these. **Prayers of faith and love, psalms and hymns of praise** fall on the astonished ears of their fellow-captives; such psalms as Ps. cii. 19, 20; lxxix. 11; lxviii. 6; cvii. 15, 16. The Lord had given His servants songs in the night (Job xxxv. 10).

4. **By the earthquake and the unloosed bonds** (v. 26).—The Lord's testimony that Paul and Silas His servants under His almighty protection (Ps. cxxi.) The jailer had not heard the singing (v. 27). Suddenly aroused by the earthquake and beheld his prisoners loose. Why did he propose suicide? Believed his life forfeited, and thought to escape disgrace. The Roman law held him answerable for the captives with his life and credit. Of what do Paul's words remind us (v. 28)? 'The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them' (Luke ix. 56). The earthquake sent not in wrath, but in love and mercy.

5. **By the jailer's conversion** (vv. 29-34).—In his terror he seized a light and sprang into the dungeon, and put the question (v. 30). The jailer convinced of sin in so far as he knew what sin meant. Felt his need of salvation (*i.e.* deliverance), but did not know the great deliverance God had provided. What he needed now was light, his soul waiting to receive it.

Now observe Paul's answer (v. 31). At once pointed to the Saviour. To this anxious soul no need to talk of repentance, nor to remind him of sins; Christ the great object of faith at once set before him. Then Paul went on to explain the Gospel to the jailer and his household. Told them of God's love in sending His Son to the world; of the death and resurrection of Jesus; of the free offer of forgiveness, and peace, and eternal life that God's servants are sent to make. **Salvation present, full, and free** for the jailer and every one who would accept it.

How did the jailer receive the word of God? (1) **Believed** on the Lord with all his house, not doubtfully, but with joy; felt the Gospel to be what they needed. (2) **Professed faith** by straightway enrolling in the Church by baptism, 'he and all his.' If young children in his family, he brought them to be dedicated to the Lord and receive the sign of cleansing grace. (3) **Proved his faith sincere** by ministering to the disciples (v. 34). Faith wrought by love. A contrast to his former treatment. Why? A new man in Christ Jesus, therefore new conduct.

6. **By the honourable release of the disciples** (vv. 35-40).—(1) The disciples citizens of Rome not by blood but by right; could not be lawfully beaten or bound until guilt proved and the emperor permitted the punishment. But the magistrates had broken that law; in fear, therefore, of punishment. (2) The disciples behaved like Christian men; did not threaten, or report their sufferings; did not refuse to depart, but insisted on honourable and open acquittal from those who had imprisoned them. This due to themselves and to their Master's cause. Thus the Gospel prevailed at Philippi, and the Lord honoured His servants' faithfulness. No Church more steadfast in after-years than the Philippians (Phil. i. 3, 6, 29, 30).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. Learn from Paul and Silas **to honour the Lord in difficult circumstances.** Their meekness in trial and loving faith under cruel sufferings were a powerful witness for the Master.

2. **Keep our eye ever fixed on our Saviour.** We are sometimes in danger of forgetting how short and simple the way of saving faith. Do we believe that Jesus is our Saviour? Then look with trust on Him, and keep looking. In that look of faith is eternal life; after that much remains for us to learn, to repent of, to correct. But he who looks thus on the Lord Jesus Christ with belief has the root of the matter in him and shall never perish (John x. 28).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The main purpose of this lesson is to show the Gospel in the persons of its missionaries victorious through divine power in the face of various endeavours of the powers of evil to thwart it. This view of the case is appropriate to the first contact of our faith with the Paganism of Europe. The contrast between the missionaries' conduct and that of their persecutors may be pointed out. The jailer's conversion is one important feature in the narrative, and may be dwelt on at length. Point out the *simplicity* of his belief. Just accepted what God's Word offered. And yet how *effectual* it was, as proved by his after-conduct. Why was this? Because that which he believed was *God's truth.* No trust in error, however sincere, could produce the same results.

XIII.—PAUL AND SILAS AT THESSALONICA AND BEREA

52 A.D.

Acts xvii. 1-15

Introduction.—In last lesson we saw the Gospel cause gain a victory at Philippi. How was this? (1) The evil spirit was cast out of the slave girl by Paul in the name of Jesus (xvi. 18). (2) Paul and Silas, by their patience and faith under suffering, gave a noble testimony to the Gospel's power (vv. 19-25). (3) The Lord by a miracle acknowledged His servants, and showed the weakness of His foes (v. 26). (4) The heathen jailer with his household was converted, and became a humble Christian (vv. 27-34). (5) The innocence of Paul and Silas was made plain, the unjust rulers were humbled, and the young Church at Philippi encouraged and strengthened (vv. 35-40).

When Paul and Silas and Timothy left Philippi, St. Luke remained behind to help in building up the Church. From xvi. 17 to xx. 5 he writes not of 'us' but of 'them,' as if he had not been of the party. The Church at Philippi thus sealed by persecution, proved one of the most faithful and loving of all. Many years later Paul wrote, 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you' (Phil. i. 3).

I. **Paul and Silas reach Thessalonica.—Thessalonica a free city under Rome.** One hundred miles south-west of Philippi. No Roman governor or soldiers there. The citizens were permitted to elect seven magistrates of their own number to rule them, and required only to pay tribute to Rome and to keep good order. **The people chiefly heathen,** with a good number of Jews settled in trade. A large, important, busy place, the chief town of Macedonia. *Now known as Salonica, and still very important, with many Jews.* Paul and Silas remained in Thessalonica at least for three weeks, and on each Sabbath Paul, as was his custom (xiii. 5, 15; xiv. 1), attended the Jews' synagogue and taught. Through the week he devoted himself to the Gentiles also. The synagogue service something like a church service, and after praise and prayer Paul, as an intelligent stranger, was asked to expound the Scriptures. We know of Paul's visit to Thessalonica from this passage, and also from **two letters to the Thessalonian Church** (1 and 2 Thessalonians), written only a few months later, when Paul reminds them often of the counsel he had given when with them. We shall now consider from these sources—

II. **Paul's Doctrine at Thessalonica,** *i.e.* what he taught.—To the Gentiles Paul preached the Gospel in its simplicity very much as at Lystra (xiv. 15-18). To the Jews Paul opened up the Old Testament Scriptures as our Lord did to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 26, 27). He showed them

1. **That Christ (or Messiah) must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead** (xvii. 3). The Jews hoped for a worldly conqueror to overcome the power of Rome. Had not considered the prophecies of a

suffering Messiah, so Paul pointed out to them such passages as Ps. xxii.; Isa. liii.; Ps. xvi. 8.

2. **That Jesus of Nazareth is that suffering and risen Messiah** (v. 3).—Paul told the Gospel story—of the life of love, the death at Calvary, the resurrection and ascension, and showed how that story fulfilled the Scriptures and proved Jesus to be 'very Christ' (ix. 22).

3. But we know from Paul's two letters that he taught more than this. What? **That the Lord Jesus shall return from heaven** (1 Thess. i. 10; iii. 13), just as the angel had announced to the eleven faithful disciples (Acts i. 11). His return shall be—(*a*) **With great glory** (1 Thess. iv. 16; see Matt. xxiv. 30, 31). (*b*) **With all His saints,** both those who have meanwhile fallen asleep in Jesus and those who shall then be caught up to meet Him (1 Thess. iv. 14-17). *Wherefore those who have lost dear ones must take comfort. How glorious the prospect of meeting here set before them!* (*c*) **Suddenly** (1 Thess. v. 2, 3). (*d*) **For judgment** on the ungodly and unbelieving who reject Him (2 Thess. i. 7-10).

4. **The Lord's disciples must therefore walk worthy of their high calling** (1 Thess. ii. 12). How? (*a*) **In holiness** (1 Thess. iv. 7). (*b*) **In loving kindness** (1 Thess. iii. 12; iv. 9). (*c*) **In watchful expectation** (1 Thess. v. 4, 8). (*d*) **In honest industry** (1 Thess. iv. 11, 12). All useful daily business is a charge from the Lord, and the Lord's coming can best be prepared for by faithful diligence in the work He has laid upon us (Matt. xxiv. 42-46).

III. **Paul's manner of Life at Thessalonica.**—The Apostle with his fellow-missionaries strove to practise what they preached.

1. **He was quite honest and sincere.**—Used no flattering words. Sought not to please others and win favour to himself, but first to profit others and win souls for Christ. Therefore told his Master's message in a plain, straightforward way (1 Thess. ii. 3-5).

2. **He was full of zeal and loving fervour.**—Could have given them not the Gospel only, but even his own soul in his longing for their good. Regarded them as a tender nurse her children (1 Thess. ii. 7, 8).

3. **He set an example of industry.**—Some brethren, in expectation of the Lord returning soon, were inclined to be idle. Paul therefore not only preached diligence but practised it (1 Thess. iv. 11; 2 Thess. iii. 8). He might have claimed support from the Church (2 Thess. iv. 9), but he would not, lest he should encourage idlers. How then did Paul live? (*a*) The kind brethren at Philippi twice sent gifts for his necessities (Phil. iv. 16). (*b*) He laboured at the trade of tent-maker he had learned when a lad. This part of God's early training of Paul now came into use. See him through the week toiling like a mechanic, all for Christ's sake, and out of love to men's souls, that he might preach the Gospel with more freedom amongst the ignorant. Paul preached by living as much as by words. We need never be ashamed to have to work with our hands. Paul did that; Jesus did that (Mark vi. 3).

IV. **The Effect of Paul's Preaching** (vv. 4-9).—1. **There was much blessing** (v. 4).—Both Jews and Gentiles received his words as the word of God (1 Thess. ii. 13). The heathen gave up their idols (1 Thess. i. 9). Endured affliction for their faith (ii. 14). A Church formed and cheered

the Apostle's heart by the love and steadfastness of its members. He gives thanks to God for them all (1 Thess. i. 2). Calls them his glory and joy (ii. 20). Remembers them always in prayer (2 Thess. i. 11).

2. **There was also trial and difficulty.**—The marks of a true work of the Lord. His enemies never idle. Some of the Jews refused to believe Paul's message and were full of envy. How did they show this? (*a*) Gathered a band of street loungers ready for any mischief, and got up a riot round the house of Jason, the friend with whom Paul and Silas lodged (v. 5). (*b*) Failing to find the missionaries, they dragged Jason and some Christian brethren who were with him before the rulers of the city, and charged them with harbouring rebels against Rome and Cæsar (vv. 6, 7). Of what does this remind us (John xix. 12)?

No doubt Paul had preached of Jesus as a king. But king of what? Not of any one earthly nation, but the rightful King of all men's hearts and lives. 'His kingdom is not of this world,' but a kingdom of truth and love.

Those heathen could not understand this. Feared lest the city might lose its freedom and be forced to receive a governor and garrison, so took security from Jason that peace would be kept (v. 9). And what of the missionaries (v. 10)? Their work at Thessalonica meanwhile done. Therefore sent by night to Berea.

V. **Paul and Silas at Berea.**—A beautiful city south-west of Thessalonica. Contained a settlement of Jews among the heathen. How did those Jews receive the missionaries (v. 11)? 'More noble,' *i.e.* less narrow and bigoted, than the Jews in Thessalonica. They gave Paul a respectful hearing and then searched the Scriptures themselves to try the truth of his words. No better treatment could be given to a teacher of truth. Teachers of error alone need fear it. What was the result of Paul's preaching? (1) **Many converts.** A Church happily begun (v. 12). (2) **Interference** from the malicious Jews of Thessalonica as soon as they heard of the Gospel prospering (v. 13). Behaved as at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (xiv.) Paul therefore obliged to depart by sea for Athens, and left Silas and Timothy to carry on the work at Berea.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. Learn from the Thessalonians (*a*) **to think much of our Master's promised return in glory.** It is the great event towards which our highest hopes ought to be set. The Gospel does not call us to prepare for death, but for the Lord's return. (*b*) **How to prepare for that day.** Not by idly dreaming of it, but by earnest doing of the duty now laid to our hand.

2. From the Bereans learn to read and hear God's word with an attentive and teachable mind. God's Word calls them 'noble' for doing this. Few can be noble in outward position. But we are all called to this true nobility of character, which is fair and open-hearted and loves to know the truth.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The references to the Epistles to the Thessalonians must be carefully read over and if possible learned by the teacher in order to use them effectively. In the case of a very young class it may be found wise to omit them except in a few general references.

XIV.—PAUL AT ATHENS

52 A.D.

Acts xvii. 16-34

Introduction.—Our lesson to-day unfolds a new scene in the progress of the Gospel. We have read of the Christian missionaries opposed by Jews at many places, and by ignorant heathen at Lystra and Philippi. To-day we see Christ's good soldier maintain the Lord's cause amongst the most learned and clever men of the day. Paul the best fitted of all Apostles for this work. How? Because born and reared at Tarsus, a Gentile city and seat of learning. Knew Greek well and accustomed to converse with students and philosophers. Driven from Thessalonica and Berea, Paul journeyed by sea to Athens, and was left there alone. He sent a message to Silas and Timothy to follow him, and meanwhile waited their arrival. We will now consider

I. **The Condition of Athens.**—1. **Outwardly a magnificent city.**—Built on several hills like our own Edinburgh, but under a clearer sky and warmer sunshine. Many fine buildings of white marble. Palaces, schools of learning, temples, and theatres, famous all over the world for beauty of shape and decoration. Statues to the number of 3000, designed by Phidias and other celebrated artists, and dedicated to heathen gods and great men of the nation. A wide market-place with shaded walks and cool fountains, the citizens' daily resort. Nothing wanting to impress a stranger with a sense of taste and refinement.

2. **A city of wonderful history.**—Once the Queen of the East, distinguished in arms as well as for her statesmen, poets, artists, philosophers, and orators. The work of the famous Athenians is still of the highest value. No other nation ever grew so wise and skilful without God's Word to guide them.

3. In Paul's day Athens not so eminent as of old, but still **the Queen of learning.** Conquered in war by Rome about 200 years before. Allowed the position of a free city like Thessalonica, and had become Rome's teacher in art and mental culture. Many youths sent from Rome to be educated at Athens.

4. To Paul, a man of good education, everything he saw full of interest. But what concerned Paul most? **The state of religion.** His heart was stirred at beholding those great and beautiful gifts of God—art, skill, wealth, culture—put to a false use. The people did not know to whom they owed them. Were 'wholly given to idolatry' (v. 16). In every street and public space an idol. Whenever the Athenians heard of a heathen god they raised an altar and a statue in his honour. A wit once said, 'In Athens you meet more gods than men.' Many of these idols were worshipped with rites of great wickedness.

Were all the Athenians idolaters? No. The **philosophers** despised the religion of the common people, but did nothing to improve it. Spent their time in the colleges and other places of resort arguing about the best rule of life. Socrates, Plato, and other great men had taught much wisdom

on this question. But these long dead, and their disciples now very inferior. Besides these there were the **Epicureans** and **Stoics** mentioned here (v. 18). The first believed in no living God and no future life. Held therefore that men ought to live for pleasure alone. The last believed that nature is God. Taught that the best life is one of indifference to pleasure and pain. No Heavenly Father, no faith, no hope, no love. A stern and dreary creed. Both Epicureans and Stoics thoroughly selfish—the one in their devotion to pleasure, the other to pride. Neither in sympathy with the Gospel. The present generation of both were idle and trifling. Loved nothing better than some new topic to set them talking.

II. **Paul's Reception** (vv. 17-21).—Paul preached 'to the Jew first,' but with unknown success. Also disputed in the market-place with the heathen. What did the philosophers think on hearing him (v. 18)?

To set forth strange gods used to be counted a crime at Athens. Now only raised curiosity. None had ever heard of Jesus and the Resurrection. All struck by Paul's power and earnestness. A new sensation. So the philosophers led the Apostle to Areopagus or Mars' Hill, the ancient meeting-place of the senate or council of Athenians, and there requested him to explain his new religion.

III. **Paul's great Speech** (vv. 22-31).—See him standing on Mars' Hill. Before him the great city with its many images, and close by stood the Acropolis, the principal height in Athens, with splendid buildings crowning it and the gigantic brazen statue of Athene, the city's guardian goddess, glittering in the sun. He began with Christian tact and good feeling. No threats or condemnation, but a friendly remark about themselves (v. 22). '*Superstitious*' here means '*religious*,' and would be taken as a compliment. Athenians loved to be thought religious. Next Paul took advantage of an altar he had seen dedicated to the unknown God. Some one, perhaps under affliction, had feared that a god he never heard of was offended with him, and so reared this altar to make sure that no god was neglected. The Athenians, therefore, by their own confession ignorant. Paul now enlightened them about this God whom they did not know.

1. The Apostle proclaimed **one God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things** (vv. 24, 25).—The idolatrous Athenians thought that the gods were numerous and lived in their temples, and that they needed constant gifts and offerings to keep them friendly. The one living and true God, independent of temples and offerings, who may be worshipped in a temple but does not dwell there, and receives gifts, but for the giver's sake, Himself the bestower of every good gift we enjoy, was indeed an 'unknown God' to the Athenians. In these words we hear the echo of Stephen's last speech uttered in Paul's hearing long ago (vii. 48).

2. **All mankind of one blood** (v. 26).—A direct blow to Athenian pride. They held themselves to be the choicest portion of the choicest race on earth. They were Greeks, refined, enlightened, cultivated. All others were barbarians. The Athenians as bad as the Jews in their pride of race. But now God's servant declares all men to be brethren, separated into nations by God's own ordering. With the truth of one creating and preserving God, he preaches one created human race. Both truths must

be accepted before there can be faith in the Gospel, for they lie at its foundation.

3. **The purpose of God's arrangement** (vv. 27, 28).—That men should see His wisdom and goodness displayed in His works and come to know Him as their Father and Friend. All our life of body and soul is through His constant care. God is a Spirit. He reveals Himself to the souls of all who seek Him. Paul reminds those Greeks that some of their own poets taught the same truth; notably a poet called Aratus of Cilicia, a countryman of the Apostle.

4. **The folly of idolatry** (v. 29).—If we are the offspring of God, how can we think to make images of our Creator with gold and silver and stone? How can we bring ourselves to worship things so far beneath us (Isa. xl. 17-22)?

5. **God's mercy and coming judgment** (vv. 30, 31).—'God our Creator and Preserver has not been blind to men's errors, but has long borne with them in His compassion. Your idolatry and love of pleasure and pride have grieved Him, but He has never punished you, because you knew no better. But now this state of things shall end. He commands all men everywhere to repent and turn from such folly at once. Why? Because the day of light has come, and judgment is coming. The day fixed. The Judge fixed. The Judge known to many men. Himself a man. Once lived on earth and warned men of this judgment (Matt. xxv. 31, 32). Proved to be the appointed Judge and His words true. How? By His resurrection from the dead.'

IV. **The result of Paul's Speech** (vv. 32-34).—A sudden interruption. No doubt Paul would have delivered his whole Gospel message, and told the story of Jesus and His love, but the audience would hear no more. How did they behave? Some mocked as at Pentecost (ii. 13; 1 Cor. i. 23). Some put off the subject. Only a few believed (Matt. xxii. 14). This reception a true mark of a genuine Gospel preacher. The Lord's fan was in His Apostle's hand to separate the chaff from the wheat (Matt. iii. 12).

PRACTICAL LESSON

Let this lesson remind us of our great privileges. The youngest child in Sunday School knows more truth about God's way of salvation than did the wisest Athenian philosopher. Remember, of those to whom much is given much will be required. It was a sad sight for Paul to see God's great and beautiful gifts misused by the Athenians through ignorance. But it is a sadder sight to see the Gospel of God's love, the pearl of great price, neglected and disobeyed through the self-will and folly of those who have known its truths from childhood. Let us pray God to keep us earnest of heart, and make us wise unto salvation.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Children of the First Grade are not expected to have read about Athens. Neither can we preface this lesson with one on Greek history. It is necessary therefore, as a rule, to use general terms instead of alluding by name to famous men of whom they have never heard.

Teachers ought to dwell upon the vanity of taste, refinement, and human learning without pure religion; all as shown by the state of Athens (Sections I., II.) Also note particularly the noble announcement in v. 30. But show that even under God's mercy ignorance was ever a misfortune and bore unhappy fruit.

XV.—PAUL'S SABBATHS AND WEEK-DAYS IN CORINTH

52, 53 A.D.

Acts xviii. 1-11

Introduction.—In last lesson we read of the Apostle at Athens. What sort of people did he encounter there? Clever and lively, some of them learned philosophers, but the greater number worshippers of idols. What was Paul's success? Very little (xvii. 33, 34). Why was this? Not merely because of idolatry. At Antioch, Lystra, Philippi, and elsewhere many idolaters accepted Christ. Not because of learning and philosophy. Many learned men have become good Christians; Paul himself a learned man. But because of idleness and pride. The Athenians did not live in earnest; listened to Paul's message out of curiosity (v. 21), but whenever he became urgent in his call for repentance and faith, they turned away; 'professing themselves to be wise, they became fools' (Rom. i. 22). No worse soil for the Gospel seed to fall on than an idle and self-conceited mind. Soon after that day on Areopagus Paul left Athens. We never read of a Church formed there. No epistle to the Athenians. Seldom mentioned in Paul's letters to others. To-day we consider Paul's first visit to Corinth.

I. **The City of Corinth.**—About two days' journey from Athens, across the isthmus (*see a map*). A great contrast. Athens compared to Edinburgh, Corinth may be likened in some respects to Glasgow. A busy, commercial city; every person in a hurry; pushing trade; at the neighbouring port of Cenchrea ships loading and unloading; men of many nations thronging the streets. Few ancient temples and monuments, but very fine new buildings erected by the Roman government. Corinth now the capital of Achaia and the residence of a proconsul or governor. A large number of Jews settled there. One very sad fact—**the people of Corinth chiefly idolaters and given to wickedness.** Their wealth and luxury without the knowledge of God did great harm. In morals the lowest city in the Roman empire. Would we not think such a place more hardened against the gospel of Jesus than the refined Athens? But remember the Master's words to the Pharisees (Matt. xxi. 31). **The Athenians like those Pharisees; the Corinthians like the publicans.**

II. **Paul's Arrival at Corinth.**—*We learn of this visit* (1) *from the passage before us;* (2) *from Paul's two letters to the Corinthians written years later;* (3) *from the letters to the Thessalonians written now at Corinth.* How does he describe his condition? One of weakness, fear, and much trembling (1 Cor. ii. 3). Why was this?

1. **Because of recent disappointment.**—He had no doubt hoped to see a Church planted at Athens that might influence educated men all the world over. The Athenians' coldness to the Gospel hurt Paul's heart more than active persecution.

2. **Because he was infirm in health.**—'In weakness'; former sickness and recent toil told on his body. Add to this the depression of disappointment and nervous anxiety for the Churches at Philippi and Thessalonica, and we understand how enfeebled the Apostle had become.

3. **Because he was alone.**—Silas and Timothy still in Macedonia, where he had sent them to encourage the brethren. Paul was a brave man and full of faith in his living Master, but his warm heart loved the sympathy of friends and felt their absence keenly.

III. **Paul's Home at Corinth** (xviii. 2, 3).—In the Apostle's weakness God gave him the comfort of a home and kind friends. Who? **Aquila and Priscilla,** Jews born in Pontus, north-east of Galatia; had settled at Rome for trade; lately driven thence by order of the emperor because of disorder among the Jews; now guided by God to Corinth to help His Apostle. Most likely converted to Christ after meeting Paul. They received him into their home (1) because he was a Jew, and unless when estranged by prejudice, the Jews in foreign lands very helpful to one another; (2) because they were of Paul's trade—tent-makers—so that they could earn their living together.

See then the Apostle once more plying the trade he learned when a boy. Day after day, as at Thessalonica, his own hands ministered to his necessities, while at the intervals of work he preached the Gospel. Why did Paul toil thus? Not because obliged. In a short time a Church formed, and then he might have claimed support from the brethren (1 Cor. ix. 4, 11, 14).

But (1) he feared lest his support might be felt a burden, and so hinder the Gospel from receiving a welcome (v. 12); (2) because he desired to feel independent and have the 'glory' and 'reward' of making the Gospel without charge (v. 18).

IV. **Paul's Preaching at Corinth.**—As ever, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (v. 4). What did Paul teach? No doubt the whole Gospel story; but as at Thessalonica he dwelt particularly on the Lord's second appearing, so now he draws particular attention to **the Lord's death** on the cross for sinners (1 Cor. xv. 3). With Athens fresh in memory, Paul, learned man though he was, would try no learned arguments, but in a direct and simple way, as his weakness allowed him, he preached Christ crucified (1 Cor. i. 23; ii. 2). Sabbath after Sabbath found him in the synagogue quietly and thoughtfully expounding the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets, and showing how the Lord Jesus fulfilled these. To the Gentiles on every opportunity he told of Christ crucified as God's great gift to guilty souls.

V. **The Effects of Paul's Preaching.**—1. **At first little success.** Why? (*a*) The cross to the Jews a stumbling-block (1 Cor. i. 23); would not believe that their Messiah could humble Himself and die a criminal's death; would not see the truth told in their own Scriptures. Their eyes blinded by wilfulness and pride of race. (*b*) The cross 'unto the Greeks foolishness' (i. 23). Regarded Paul's story as an idle tale like one of their nation's old legends, believed by no intelligent Greek.

2. **But presently Paul's strength and courage increased.** Health improved. The return of Silas and Timothy cheered him by their fellowship, still more by their good account of the Thessalonians. These had remained steadfast under affliction, and full of faith and love (1 Thess. iii. 5, 6, 7).

So Paul turned with new heart and vigour to his apostolic work—'was

pressed in spirit' (v. 5); 'the love of Christ constrained him' (2 Cor. v. 14); felt the necessity laid upon him (1 Cor. ix. 16).

Was his success better now? Yes; the Gospel proved itself **the power of God and the wisdom of God** (1 Cor. i. 24). Not through enticing words, but through demonstration of God the Spirit (ii. 4, 5). A sure token of the Gospel's progress lay in **the opposition of the Jews.** Whenever true work being done for Christ, His enemies are disturbed and seek to hinder it. How did Paul regard those Jews (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16)? *Those words written about this time at Corinth.* See, too, what **he said** to them (Acts xviii. 6 ; compare xiii. 46, 47). See what **he did** (v. 7). No use remaining among wilful unbelievers while hungry Gentile souls waited to be fed. Justus, like Cornelius, a godly Gentile. Paul preached in his house, but continued to dwell with Aquila and Priscilla.

3. After this change Paul saw **good fruits of his labour.** Many gave up unbelief and wickedness and became humble disciples. **A large and zealous Church formed at Corinth.** Among others we know of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue (v. 8), Gaius, Stephanas, Erastus (Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. xvi. 17). **Above all, Paul received his Master's encouragement and approval** (vv. 9, 10, 11).

If Paul ever tempted to faint like Elijah of old (1 Kings xix. 10), now like Elijah he obtained the assurance of God's help, and the cheering knowledge that many souls unknown to him were turned to the light (1 Kings xix. 18). The Lord knoweth them that are His (compare John x. 16). Comforted and strengthened, the Apostle continued to labour for eighteen months among the Corinthians.

PRACTICAL LESSON

Do you know and feel in Christ crucified the power of God and the wisdom of God? Does the thought of His death on the cross for you give you peace and strength to resist temptation? Do you see in it that God knows what our sinful souls need, viz. forgiveness and strength? If you do, thank God for His mercy. If you do not, ask God to open your heart to the light of His love; pray like a wise man long ago, 'Lord, show me Thyself, show me myself, give me Thy Holy Spirit.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The central point of interest in this lesson is the success of the Gospel among the depraved Corinthians after it was rejected at Athens. The passages referred to ought to be carefully read over in preparation, and in particular the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians. A good opportunity for pressing upon children the central doctrine of our faith in its simplicity, viz. Christ crucified the crowning token of God's wisdom and God's love towards a sinful world.

XVI.—PAUL AND THE EPHESIAN CHURCH

54-57, 58 A.D.

Acts xix. 8-12, 18-20; xx. 17-38

Introduction.—From last lesson we pass a period of nearly two years. In that time Paul had been persecuted at Corinth by the Jews, set at liberty by Gallio the Roman governor, had left Corinth along with Aquila and Priscilla, parted from them at Ephesus, and gone on to Antioch, and up to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Thence back to Antioch, and soon after set out upon his third great mission journey.

In that journey Paul had visited Phrygia and Galatia, and there he found that the hearts of the Galatians had been turned away from the pure Gospel. Jewish teachers had disturbed their faith with the error we have seen so often corrected (Lesson XI.) Full of sorrow and anger, Paul had made his way through Asia. This time no message from God forbade him. Soon he arrived for the second time at Ephesus, the great capital of Asia, where God willed that he should remain for three busy and memorable years.

I. **The City of Ephesus.**—At the mouth of the river Cayster, and a great sea-port. Like Corinth in its fine buildings and busy commerce. Full of hard-working, money-making people, chiefly Greeks, and Asiatics, with a number of Jews. Like Athens in its love of idolatry. Only at Ephesus not so many temples and altars. Worship paid principally to the goddess Diana, whose temple was the greatest building in Asia, and one of the seven wonders of the world. No cathedral or church in Great Britain can compare with it. In this temple a rough wooden image of Diana believed by the heathen to have fallen from their great god Jupiter. The Ephesians very proud of their temple and image. Regarded them also with awe and fear. Treasures therefore often placed in the temple, as in a bank, for safety. Visitors from all nations came to admire it, and some of the Ephesians made money by selling small silver models of the temple for strangers to carry away with them. For what purpose? To wear as a charm that they thought would protect the wearer from danger, just as Roman Catholics sometimes carry little images of the Virgin Mary.

II. What **state of religion** did Paul find at Ephesus?—1. **Much heathen darkness**, as we have seen. The heathen given to wicked habits and did not know their sinfulness (Eph. ii. 1, 2).

2. **Much Jewish blindness.**—A synagogue where every Sabbath prayer was offered and the Scriptures read, but with dim understanding of their meaning.

3. **Some imperfect Gospel light.**—Apollos of Alexandria, 'an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures' (xviii. 24), had learned about Jesus and believed Him to be the Messiah. This faith he had preached to the Jews at Ephesus and made some converts. Aquila and Priscilla were also there, and had taught Apollos 'the way of God more perfectly' (xviii. 26). But now Apollos had gone away to Corinth, and the disciples he left behind were still very ignorant. Something like the Apostles before Pentecost. They believed in the Father and the Son, repented of their sins, had been baptized as John the Baptist used to baptize, but they did not know of God the

Spirit, nor of His gifts conferred on believers (xix. 2). Paul's first care at Ephesus, therefore, was to have those disciples properly taught, and baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Matt. xxviii. 19). He then laid apostolic hands upon them and the special gifts of the Spirit descended (xix. 6).

III. **Paul's Missionary Labours at Ephesus** (xix. 8-12).—1. Again to the Jew first (v. 8). With what success? Very little. Only roused opposition to the Gospel (v. 9). Why was this? (1) Not Paul's fault. For (*a*) he spake boldly, told the whole counsel of God. (*b*) He 'disputed and persuaded' (v. 9). Appealed both to right reason and right feeling. (*c*) He persevered. For three months those Jews heard the truth urged Sabbath after Sabbath, and perhaps more often, with all the Apostle's earnestness and skill. (2) Not the Gospel's fault. 'It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first' (Rom. i. 16). Jesus was standing at the door of their hearts seeking to enter (Rev. iii. 20). (3) Only the fault of their own blind, obstinate self-will that would not see the light (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4). Christ *compels* no man to believe.

How did Paul accept this result? No doubt very grieved, for he loved his nation (Rom. ix. 1, 2, 3). But he was 'debtor to the Greeks and to the barbarians' (Rom. i. 14), so separated from the synagogue, and took the converts with him to a Greek school or lecture hall (v. 9).

2. For two years now we see hard, steady work done in Ephesus. Daily in the school of Tyrannus the Church met and Paul explained and defended the faith of Christ. The place grew famous. Jews and heathen came from all the surrounding country to hear, to question, and to learn (v. 10). Ephesus a great centre of Gospel light. This ministry at Ephesus was carried on—(*a*) **In humility of spirit,** much tried by Jewish pride and hatred (xx. 19). Paul was too faithful a Christian to despise or not to care for the ill-will of his neighbours. It was a grief to him. (*b*) **In honesty of heart.** Kept back nothing profitable. Publicly and privately preached repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ (xx. 20, 21). (*c*) **In loving and earnest regard** for his hearers' souls (v. 31). (*d*) **In generous self-denial.** As at Thessalonica and Corinth, Paul earned his living with his hands, so that none could accuse him of covetousness (vv. 33, 34). But further, he set an example of generous industry for his neighbours' benefit as well as his own (v. 35). [*The words of Jesus here quoted by Paul are not written in the gospels, but the disciples must have told Paul many of the Lord's unwritten sayings.*]

Such a faithful ministry honoured of God. See now

IV. **The Tokens of Blessing** (vv. 17-20).—1. **The power** of working miracles increased (xix. 11). Paul's very garments had a healing power against disease and evil spirits (v. 12). A mark this of the Lord's favour and also of his hearers' faith. Gospel miracles were not wrought for those in unbelief.

2. **The whole city awakened to a sense of God's work amongst them.** —The failure of the seven sons of Sceva, a Jew, to cast out devils by using the name of Jesus in unbelief, proved that here was something more than mere magic (vv. 13-16). The name of Jesus was spoken with fear and reverence by Jews as well as Greeks (v. 17).

3. **Many who had become disciples now proved their sincerity.**—(*a*) By confessing their errors and acts of falsehood, such as tricks of sorcery that they now saw to be unworthy of believers in Christ. (*b*) The sorcerers and tricksters brought their foolish books of magic and burned them in public. Nearly two thousand pounds' worth destroyed at once (v. 19). Could they not have sold instead of burning them? No, for then they would have hurt the minds of others. To sell bad books is worse than to keep them.

Thus the Word of God overcame God's enemies (v. 30).

V. Paul's Farewell (xx. 17-38).—Unable to visit his brethren at Ephesus, Paul sent for the elders (*ministers*) of the Ephesian Church to come to him (v. 17).

Observe his parting address. (1) He **looks back** over the three years' ministry we have just considered, and calls the elders to witness that he is 'pure from the blood of all men' (v. 26). If any turn from the Lord or perish in unbelief he cannot be held guilty. Why? (v. 27; compare Ezek. xxxiii. 1-9). (2) **He looks forward** and foretells—(*a*) About himself. That bonds and afflictions await him (v. 23). (*b*) About them. That they should be troubled from without and from within by false teachers and guides (vv. 29, 30). (*c*) About both. That they should meet no more on earth (v. 25). (3) **He warns** and counsels them to take heed—(*a*) To themselves. Impossible to serve others well if they did not watch their own lives and resist temptation. (*b*) To their flocks, whose souls God had set them to feed and tend as His precious possession bought with the Redeemer's blood (v. 28).

Paul's farewell spoken, we see that little band kneel on the shore at Miletus while their beloved father in Christ commends them to God in prayer (v. 36). A weeping company of Christian men bring him to the ship; all sorrowful, but not without hope.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. Learn from the Ephesian converts to **give up willingly** whatever hinders the service of our Master. We may not be called upon to burn books, though there are some books fit only for burning,—foolish books, and bad, improper books; but we are all called from time to time to part with something that keeps us back—idle habits, bad companions, foolish ways. Ask God to strengthen us to give them up, and to do it joyfully, not as a hardship but as a privilege.

2. Learn to **cherish Christian friendship.** We ought to be kind and civil to all. But try and have for intimate friends those who love our Master, Jesus Christ. In all other friendships, however pleasant, there is a serious want. Paul's parting with friends at Miletus was sad, but there was a bright, eternal hope to cheer them. What would it have been with no such hope?

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It is impossible in the compass of one lesson to treat the career of the Church of Ephesus in even a superficial manner; so many facts of interest are known regarding it after Paul's departure. It is best therefore, to dwell on the points here mentioned, viz. Paul's coming, his labours, his success, and his farewell. The other incidents mentioned in Acts may be stated incidentally. A map should be used for the opening part of the lesson.

XVII.—PAUL PERSECUTED AT JERUSALEM

58 A.D.

Acts xxi. 17-40; xxiii. 10-35

Read in class Acts xxi. 17-33; xxiii. 10-23

Introduction.—In last lesson we read of Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus. What did he tell them of his own prospects? That bonds and afflictions awaited him at Jerusalem. How did the Apostle know this? By the Holy Ghost witnessing either directly to his own heart, or else through a prophet or inspired preacher in each city he visited (xx. 22). We read of one such witness in Paul's journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem. Agabus, a prophet, met Paul at Cæsarea at the house of Philip the Evangelist. Taking Paul's girdle, he bound his own hands and feet, and declared that thus should the Jews at Jerusalem treat the owner of the girdle (xxi. 11). Did Paul shrink from this coming trial? Not at all. Like the Master, his face was steadfastly set towards Jerusalem. Friends strove to keep him back, but in vain; he only begged them not to break his heart with the sight of their grief (xxi. 13). Then they ceased persuading, and said, 'The will of the Lord be done' (v. 14). Our lesson to-day treats of the beginning and the end of this memorable visit to Jerusalem.

I. **Paul's Reception.**—1. From James, chief pastor in the Church, and the brethren along with him, **a warm welcome** (vv. 17, 18). They believed in Paul's mission to the Gentiles, and rejoiced at the tidings of God's mighty works in bringing the world into the fold of Christ (vv. 19, 20).

2. From the Christian Pharisees **a doubtful welcome.** They respected Paul's zeal and devotion, but were not sure of his loyalty to the Jewish nation and faith (v. 21).

3. From the Jews **no welcome at all**, but a scowl of hatred wherever recognised. They regarded the veteran Apostle as a traitor to the Jewish race and religion.

II. **Prudent Counsels.**—Among so much hatred and suspicion, Paul's friends advised him to clear his character (vv. 22-24). How? By going to the temple with four men who had taken a Nazarite vow, viz. to let their hair grow and abstain from wine probably for thirty days. This was a Jewish mode of proclaiming thankfulness to God for special mercies, and Paul himself had practised it after his first dangers in Europe (xviii. 18). At the close of the month they shaved their heads, went to the temple, if within reach, on seven successive days, and offered sacrifice (Num. vi.) Now Paul went with those four men for the seven days of purification, and paid the cost of their sacrifices in hopes of satisfying Jewish Christians that he was still a loyal Jew. Unbelievers also would be put to silence.

III. **A Riot and a Rescue** (vv. 27-40).—Was this step successful? No. Some Jews from Ephesus who knew the Apostle, saw him in the streets of Jerusalem with Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile friend. Meeting Paul in the temple they imagined Trophimus to be still with him, and raised the cry that he was profaning the holy place by introducing a Gentile (vv. 27-29). Soon the falsehood spread. Paul was dragged into

the street, the temple gates were shut to keep out rioters, a tumult arose, and the Apostle's life was in danger. As the blows fell upon him, how Stephen must have come to mind! But Paul's life-work was not done yet. Suddenly the crowd pause in their violence. There is a glitter of bright helmets, the tramp of armed men, a word of command, the rabble is parted to right and left like water before the bows of a ship, and Paul finds himself once more in the stern custody of Roman soldiers. What did the chief captain now order (v. 33)? Why did he treat Paul thus (v. 38)? This Egyptian a dangerous criminal, leader of 4000 sicarii or professed assassins, lately dispersed by the Roman troops. Where was Paul taken for safety (v. 34)? The castle or fort of Antonia close to the temple. Hear the mob shout, 'Away with him.' Whom does that cry bring to mind? Not Stephen, but Stephen's Master (John xix. 15). **The calmest man in that assemblage is Paul himself.** Of what is he thinking? His own safety? His evil treatment? His prospects of imprisonment? None of these, but his Master's cause. Gazing from the castle stairs on the sea of faces around him, Paul's faithful spirit rises to the occasion. He sees a chance of witnessing for the Lord. Who can tell what power of the Holy Ghost may follow? His loving heart goes out with longing for his misguided nation in their unbelief. A few words of explanation and Lysias halts the guard and allows Paul to speak to the people (vv. 39, 40).

IV. **A cheering Assurance** (xxiii. 11).—We turn now to the second passage in our lesson. See Paul in the fortress chained to a soldier. Sad at heart. Why? Not on account of his sufferings, but because they seem to have been in vain. How is this? His address to the crowd, spoken in their own sacred tongue and full of holy wisdom, had done no good, but ended in renewed uproar as soon as he announced his mission to the Gentiles (xxii. 21). After avoiding the torture of the scourge by claiming his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul had been called to speak to the Sanhedrin or Jewish Council of Seventy. Here he had met with insult (xxiii. 2), and soon again found himself the centre of a tumult (v. 9). Priests, elders, and people seemed stubborn as ever, and only the strong authority of Rome had saved Paul's life (v. 10). **Wearied and disheartened**, Paul now slept. Suddenly a vision (v. 11). As on the way to Damascus (ix. 5), in the temple (xxii. 17, 18), and at Corinth (xviii. 9), the Master Himself appears to encourage His servant. What does He tell him? (1) To be of good cheer; for he had given his testimony at Jerusalem. The issue was not in his hands. His part had been well done. How cheering to know that the Lord satisfied! (2) This captivity would not hinder him from testifying at Rome. Paul had longed to do so (xix. 21; Rom. i. 11-13). His visit seemed far off now. Yet through this very captivity the Lord would bring it about. He led His servant by ways that he knew not.

V. **The Jews baffled** (vv. 12-35).—We have seen Paul in continual peril during this stay at Jerusalem. From what cause? The fury of the Jews. It had pursued him all through his mission journeys in Asia and Europe, but at Jerusalem most violent. How had Paul escaped? By God's Providence throwing over him the protection of the Roman law and authority. **Now the danger greater than ever** (vv. 12, 13), for—(1) **The**

Jews grown desperate in their hatred, and desperate men regardless of consequences. Their vow not only *deadly* but *urgent*, and must be carried out without delay. (2) **This murder** not the purpose of the forty zealots only, but **known and approved by the chief priests and elders** (vv. 14, 15).

How did God defeat their villainy? (1) By bringing it about that **Paul's nephew heard of it** (v. 16). (2) **By Paul's own coolness and presence of mind** (v. 17). He knew that the Lord was with him, his preservation promised (v. 11); but that did not make him careless. It made him expect God's blessing on the means of safety. (3) **By the prompt action and trained skill of Lysias** (vv. 18-25). Commanding the garrison of a turbulent city, Lysias had to be ready for any emergency. Often called upon to judge rapidly and take strong action, so now there is no delay. While the chief priests and murderers are arranging their plot, their victim is quietly taken out of reach. Lysias is unconsciously fulfilling the divine plans. After nightfall a band of 470 soldiers march out of the city.

Why so many to guard one man? (*a*) Because Paul a **Roman citizen,** and therefore to be taken great care of. (*b*) Paul had won respect by his personal bearing. The brave Roman recognised a brave man, and did him honour. We see this still further from the letter of Lysias to Felix the governor. Here Lysias (*a*) claims credit for having rescued Paul from the rabble, but says nothing of the mistake he committed in binding him; (*b*) declares Paul to be accused of no crime worthy of punishment. Thus God brought wicked counsels to nought. We can imagine the Jews' feelings next morning when Lysias told them that the prisoner was at Cæsarea. We do not know what befell the **forty zealots,** but men so crafty and wicked would no doubt find an excuse to escape starvation.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Beware of cherishing hatred against any one.**—Here were priests of God's temple and scribes, whose duty it was to teach the sixth commandment, plotting with base assassins to murder a man because they disliked his religious teaching. They forgot that God has called us to love all men, even if we do not agree with them. **Nothing entitles us to hate a brother man.** If we give way to ill-will and bad feeling in trifles of daily life, we may be found some day as bad as those Jews, or even like Cain, whose steps they sought to follow.

2. **Always trust in God's guarding Providence.**—Paul's position often desperate enough, but God never failed His servant, and the strongest attempts of enemies hastened on the fulfilment of God's purposes. We have the same assurance of our Father's protection, if we only trust in Him and strive to do the right (Ps. xxvii. 1-3; xxxiv. 21, 22; xxxvii. 1-8, 30; Rom. viii. 28).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The teacher should go over the whole narrative with the children, and then point out the instances of God's Providence thwarting the malice of the wicked Jews. Remind the class of God's purpose that His Apostle should testify at Rome also, and show how the most untoward events were made to conduce to that end. Both the Practical Lessons ought to be enforced with care.

XVIII.—PAUL AND FELIX

58-60 A.D.

Acts xxiv.

Introduction.—In our last lesson we saw the Apostle escape the murderous plot of the Jews. How? Through Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, sending him from Jerusalem to Cæsarea to be tried by Felix, governor of Judæa. That journey of sixty miles occupied two days. On reaching Cæsarea, Paul, a Roman citizen, was lodged in honourable custody in Herod's old palace until his accusers should follow.

To-day we consider: (1) **Paul's trial and its result.** (2) **Paul's Gospel testimony and its effect.**

I. **Paul's Trial.**—1. See Paul now in the Roman governor's court at Cæsarea. A prisoner at the bar, yet the Lord's free man; weak in bodily presence, feeble of voice (2 Cor. x. 10), but strong in mind and spirit; and better still, strong in faith, fearless and confident in his Master's presence, His cause, and his own honest purpose.

2. Observe **the judge.—Felix, governor of Judæa**, one of the worst rulers that ever lived. (*a*) Corrupt and easily bribed to injustice. (*b*) Weak in judgment and easily flattered. (*c*) Selfish and wicked; his Jewish wife Drusilla had been tempted away from her first husband because Felix wished to marry her. (*d*) Cruel and vindictive; had maintained 'great quietness' (v. 2) by causing terror through repeated massacres of Jews. Had caused Jonathan, the high priest, to be murdered by assassins for venturing to rebuke him.

3. Observe **the accusers** (v. 1).—Ananias and Jewish elders (*i.e.* members of council) keen, bitter, remorseless as ever; along with them Tertullus, a Roman advocate hired to plead their cause skilfully before the Roman governor.

4. **The charge against Paul.**—Tertullus, after paying the judge a false compliment (vv. 2, 3), accuses the Apostle of **three offences** (vv. 5, 6). (*a*) That he created disturbance in the Empire, and everywhere stirred up the Jews to rebel against Cæsar; (*b*) that he was a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes and a teacher of strange doctrine (xviii. 13); (*c*) that he attempted to profane the temple (xxi. 28, 29). These charges Tertullus offered to prove by evidence; and the Jews around him declared them to be true (vv. 8, 9).

5. Now see **Paul's defence.**—Answers 'cheerfully,' the more so that he knows Felix to be well acquainted with the nation (v. 10), and able, therefore, not only to hear charges, but to judge of their truth. (*a*) The charge of sedition he denies (vv. 11-13). Points out the very short time he had been at Jerusalem, and challenges them to prove that he stirred up rebellion there or anywhere. (*b*) The charge of heresy or new doctrine he confesses, but denies that there is guilt in it (vv. 14-16). He believes in the Jewish law and the prophets; he shares the hope of a resurrection that the most of the Jews cherish, and he believes in the final judgment. And what is the result of that belief (v. 16)? 'Herein'—*i.e.* in that faith—does he 'exercise

himself,' strives, watches, toils, prays. To what intent? To keep conscience clear toward God and toward men. What does Paul mean by that? That he seeks to live so that conscience, God's warning voice in his heart, may not accuse him of want of trust, love, and obedience towards God, or of want of truth and goodwill towards his fellow-men. Does Paul declare that he always kept his conscience thus free of accusing thoughts? No. He knew well his own weakness. What had he written to the Roman Christians (Rom. vii. 19-23)? But it was his aim and constant endeavour to keep conscience clear, and the thought of the resurrection and the coming judgment urged him so to do. (*c*) The third charge Paul also denies. So far from profaning the temple, he honoured it by observing its strictest ceremonies, and was so engaged when attacked. Instead of despising the Jewish nation, one of his chief purposes in visiting Jerusalem was to bring alms and offerings from brethren abroad (v. 17). The charges against him thus contained no truth (2 Cor. viii. 19-22).

6. **The result.**—Felix decides nothing, but defers till he can hear the chief captain's account. Why is this? (*a*) Felix knows Paul to be guiltless, but does not wish to offend the Jews. (*b*) Hopes that the Christian Church may yet buy off their leader with a bribe (v. 26). Accordingly Paul is sent back to prison, but with commands that he be treated well and leniently, and be allowed to see his friends (vv. 22, 23).

II. **Paul's Testimony and its Effect** (vv. 24-27).—Felix does not forget his Jewish prisoner. His wife Drusilla, sister of Herod Agrippa II., is a Jewess, and both of them know something of the Christians; desire therefore to hear more of this new religion from so distinguished a leader as Paul. See the Apostle then summoned into the ruler's presence and invited to expound the faith that is in him. What was Paul's testimony? Doubtless at some time he told the whole Gospel story, but first of all he **reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come** (v. 25). Why? Because these were the first truths that **Felix and Drusilla needed to hear.** This was—(1) **A brave testimony.** (2) **A faithful testimony.**

1. Paul could very easily have spoken smooth things, or by a glowing account of the Christian faith and hope won admiration for his eloquence and skill. But no. Paul there in his Master's room to testify as he believed the Master would have done. His aim not to win favour but to convince, convert, and save. Therefore he spake home truths boldly. (*a*) To that **corrupt ruler** he reasoned of **righteousness.** How God requires all men to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly in His sight. How the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. vi. 10). And it is more blessed to give than to receive. (*b*) To that **self-indulgent, wicked man** he reasoned of **temperance,** of restraining evil passions, turning away from evil thoughts, coarse words, unclean actions; of keeping the body, with all its temptations to laziness, greed, and evil, in strict control. (*c*) To that **guilty pair** Paul reasoned of **judgment to come.** Without this argument the others would be of little use to such as them.

Want of righteousness is disgraceful in a judge, and renders him a traitor to the ends of justice; but then Felix did not care for justice. Want of temperance degrades, robs men and women of self-respect, and makes them lower than the beasts that perish; but Felix, with all his pride of power,

has no true self-respect. As long as he pleases himself he cares for nothing higher. **But judgment to come**—a day when every man shall give account of himself to God, and reap as he has sown in this life; a day when God shall judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; a day when every man shall receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad—that struck a tender place in Felix's heart, love of self. With that truth Paul drives home the others, for He knew this was the only chance of turning that guilty ruler and princess from the power of Satan to God.

2. **The result of Paul's testimony.**—On **Drusilla** we learn of no result. **Hardened in sin.** In her soul the good seed fell by the wayside (Matt. xiii. 4). On **Felix** different. **He trembled.** Conscience touched, though only by selfish fears. Felix remembers his bribes, his cruelty, his injustice, his assassination of Jonathan, his theft of Drusilla from her husband. Little does he regret those sins, but he dreads the consequence. To stand in presence of One whom nothing can deceive, and have all the evil actions of his life passed before him, and be condemned with a terrible justice, and be punished according to his deeds. The thought was horrible; so Felix trembled. But what further? Will he repent? Like Saul at Damascus, call upon the Lord (ix. 6)? Or entreat Paul like the jailer (xvi. 30)? Neither; he puts off (v. 25). **Did the convenient season ever come? Very soon** and **often** for hearing Paul, because Paul was near him for two years (vv. 26, 28). But for **repentance** and **faith?** Never. That trembling was the day of visitation to Felix, and he let it pass. Christ was knocking at his heart's door and he would not open.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Reverence the voice of conscience.**—It is God who speaks in it to your hearts. Remember, once conscience has spoken, if you refuse to obey, it will not speak so loudly again. By degrees its voice will grow lower and lower till you hear it no longer. But the sin and the guilt of neglecting God's warning voice will remain yours.

2. Seek ever to find in the Bible God's present message to your soul. The Word of God is great and beautiful as history, as poetry, as literature. No one who knows it is uneducated. But God has given it first for **doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.** Ask God to apply it to you as Paul applied it to Felix according to your true need, and ask Him to give you an understanding and obedient heart.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

To teach this lesson well, care must be taken on the one hand not to lose sight of the historical sequence of Paul's trial as part of the narrative of St. Luke, and on the other not to omit enforcing the spiritual lesson at the conclusion. The danger is that of dwelling too exclusively on the last four verses as if they constituted the whole lesson. Let Section I. therefore have a good share of attention first, and Section II. with the Practical Lessons will be found to apply with all the greater force.

XIX.—PAUL AND FESTUS

60 A.D.

Acts xxv.

Introduction.—In last lesson we read of Paul before Felix. Who was Felix? Roman governor of Judæa. Do you remember over what territory the Roman Emperor ruled at this time? The whole known world. And in each country he had governors called by various names—*e.g.* proconsul, prætor, procurator—ruling under him. Sometimes a city was left with its own magistrates, as at Thessalonica; and sometimes a country with a native king, like Herod; but only by permission from Rome.

What was Rome then celebrated for? (1) Its **military force.** No other nation could stand before it. (2) Its **power of government.** The Romans could keep all they won. Everywhere they brought order and civilisation; made roads, cities, harbours, and arranged all matters of government with care and success. (3) **Its wise and just laws.** Many of the Roman laws our own laws to-day.

We have seen Paul protected by Roman law and government several times. (*a*) **At Philippi** treated honourably as soon as his citizenship known (Acts xvi. 37-39). His sufferings there were not by law, but because of unjust magistrates. (*b*) **At Corinth** set free by Gallio, the Roman ruler (xviii. 12-16). (*c*) **At Jerusalem** rescued by Roman authority from violence and murder (xxi. 32; xxiii. 23), and by the power of Roman law from scourging (xxii. 25).

No doubt the Roman laws were often administered by corrupt and wicked men. But even those men's conduct was to some extent controlled by the laws. And many rulers just and fair. We have seen Paul **kept a prisoner for two years** by **Felix—a bad ruler.** Why? (*a*) Because Felix sought at that moment to please the Jews. (*b*) Because he hoped to get a bribe by releasing him.

To-day we read of good laws administered by a righteous ruler; yet how blind even an honest man without the light of God's Word and Spirit.

I. **Roman Justice and Jewish Malice.**—Porcius Festus governor in room of Felix. In every respect a contrast to the latter. We never read of him taking bribes, or of his cruelty, or of justice perverted or delayed. Throughout this story he is earnest, just, and reasonable. How does that appear?

1. Three days after his arrival at Cæsarea **he visits Jerusalem,** the native capital of his province. The Jews the most interesting and difficult to manage of all Rome's conquered nations. The sooner he became acquainted with their leaders the better (v. 1).

2. The high priest and Jewish elders (members of council) vindictive as ever against Paul. Think an opportunity now come. A new and inexperienced ruler no doubt anxious to oblige. So they come to Festus with a false story regarding Paul (v. 2). What do they request? (*a*) That he be condemned simply on their word of accusation. They denounce him as a criminal worthy of death, and expect that Festus will order his

execution (v. 15). What does Festus reply **(v. 16)**? **A noble declaration of justice.** What do the Jews next ask for? (*b*) That Paul be brought for trial to Jerusalem. Why (v. 3)? Secretly intend that the zealots may yet fulfil their vow (xxiii. 12). But again **the ruler's justice baffles them.** Paul a Roman citizen, in his care at Cæsarea, the Roman headquarters. Only right that he should meet his accusers there (vv. 4, 5).

3. **On Festus' return to Cæsarea he loses no time in summoning Paul before him** (v. 6). Again the malicious accusers appear. Again the old charges repeated. (*a*) Sedition against Cæsar. (*b*) Heresy or false teaching against the Jewish law. (*c*) Sacrilege or profanity against the temple; with many other grievous complaints. In no way has the two years' delay softened their spirit. But what is the weak point? They can prove nothing; and the accused denies everything (vv. 7, 8). What does Festus think of this? **He is perplexed** (v. 20). Because—(*a*) he can see nothing worthy of death in Paul's conduct; (*b*) he cannot properly understand the Jews' charges. They do not concern Roman law, but their own superstition (religion). Yet they seem to be held very important by the Jews, and in his ignorance he hesitates to acquit the prisoner. How does Festus hope to escape the difficulty? By inviting Paul to go of his own accord to be tried at Jerusalem (v. 9). Observe, he does not trifle with justice. The chief priests sought Paul to be brought up by force. Festus puts it to his own choice merely as a convenient manner of getting more light, and an act of courtesy towards the Jews.

II. **A Roman Citizen's Right** (vv. 10, 11).—How does Paul receive the governor's proposal? He answers—(1) **With boldness.** Reminds the governor that he does not stand before a Jewish, but a Roman tribunal. Declares his innocence and the governor's own knowledge of it (v. 10). Declares his willingness to suffer as a Roman citizen if he has broken the Roman law by crime; but if not, he refuses to stand at any Jewish judgment-seat, and dares any man to send him there. (2) **With prudence.** Claims his right as a citizen. '**I appeal unto Cæsar.**' What do those words mean? **Words of power in the mouth of a Roman.** After those words, no magistrate dare judge him, but must send his case to Rome without delay, to be **decided by the Emperor himself.**

Accordingly we see Festus, after consulting with his assessors or *advisers*, at once admit Paul's demand (v. 12). **Thus under God's Providence has Paul's captivity begun to fulfil the Master's promise** (xxiii. 11).

III. **Festus in a Difficulty.**—Did this decision relieve Festus from perplexity? Only in part. Two duties now remained for him—(1) To forward his prisoner on the earliest opportunity; (2) to send a written statement of the charge against him for the Emperor's consideration.

The first of these is simple enough. But what of the second? Festus feels at a loss. The former difficulty again meets him. He does not know Jewish laws and customs, and he can state no charge against Paul regarding the laws of Rome. To despatch the prisoner to tell his own story, and send no statement with him, would be 'unreasonable' (v. 27) and disrespectful to Cæsar.

IV. **A Way of Relief.**—Two royal visitors came to pay their respects to the new governor—Herod Agrippa, king of Chalcis, and Bernice, his

sister—both Jews, well acquainted with the law and interested to hear of Paul and the Christian faith. So Festus thinks to clear his difficulty by obtaining Agrippa's opinion of Paul's case. See then **a distinguished assembly in Festus' judgment-hall.** The Roman judge, the king, and the princess, with guards and attendants on every side. Nothing wanting to make the occasion brilliant and imposing. The greatest man of all stands chained to a soldier (v. 23), calmly gazing on the scene. His soul is full of the peace that passeth understanding.

V. **The natural Man's Blindness.**—What Paul said on this occasion we shall consider in next lesson. What was **the effect on Festus?** Did he tremble like Felix, or mock like the Athenians, or grow furious like the Jews? None of these. But **he declared the Apostle to be mad** (xxvi. 24). Remembering Paul's love for books and parchments, this honest Roman soldier, with little learning himself, supposed that over-study of the Jewish Scriptures had injured the Apostle's brain.

Why this idea? Had Paul spoken wildly or like a madman? Nay, but with words of truth and soberness (v. 25).

Festus' estimate of Paul arose—(1) From **his ignorance** of the Jews' religion, so that it was all a strange tale to him. (2) From the **unspiritual state of his heart.** An honest heart, but still unenlightened by the Gospel—still unquickened by God the Spirit (1 Cor. ii. 14). Festus, with all his good qualities, was still 'the natural man.' He had never felt the need of pardon and peace and a strength above his own to lead him onward. And therefore Paul's earnest words seemed the tokens of an unsound mind.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. Let us thank God that we live in days of justice and good order. We do not realise our blessings until we read of lands where judges are corrupt and justice very difficult to obtain. Remember our fathers toiled and suffered to win the liberties we enjoy; and God has given them, not to be wasted selfishly, but to be used for His glory, and to be handed down to those who come after us. Law, order, and liberty form a precious heritage.

2. Let us pray God to quicken our hearts ever to perceive and keep hold of the truths of His Gospel. Some may scoff, and worldly friends may think us mad. Remember we and they view the world from different standpoints. It is a bad sign of our Christianity if worldly men and we show no serious difference in word and conduct.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The chief points to enforce in this lesson are: (1) All the knowledge of God's truth the Jews possessed did not make them superior to this Roman, and that because the Roman lived up to the measure of light he had. (2) The light of natural religion, *i.e.* religion without the **revealed Word,** can never make wise unto salvation. Festus, with many good qualities, thought an earnest Christian mad because his unspiritual mind could not understand the Christian position and aims.

XX.—PAUL AND AGRIPPA

60 A.D.

Acts xxvi.

Introduction.—In our last lesson we saw Paul before a distinguished assembly in the court-house at Cæsarea. Festus the Roman governor, Agrippa, king of Chalcis, his sister the Princess Bernice, with the chief captains and leading citizens, all gathered in state to hear the Christian Apostle tell of his faith. What was the cause of this meeting? The difficulties of Festus the new governor. He had to send Paul to Cæsar at Rome, and he did not know what to write regarding him. What did Festus exclaim after hearing Paul (xxv. 24)? Now Paul and Festus had something in common. Both were brave men, honest and anxious to do their duty as far as they knew it. Each seems to have held the other in respect. How then did Festus fall into this error? Because Festus did not know Paul's faith and hope. Ignorant of the Gospel and the Old Testament, his soul, though upright according to his light, had very little light. Paul's enthusiasm and eloquence regarding Jesus, who, he said, had been crucified and raised from the dead, were as a strange language to the plain Roman soldier. They brought Festus into a region of which he knew nothing. He had not patience to study the questions for himself. It was easier to call the Apostle mad, and suppose that he had hurt himself by over-study of the Scriptures. To-day we consider the Gospel's effect on a different character.

I. **Herod Agrippa II., King of Chalcis,** was son of Herod mentioned in chap xii. (see Lesson IX.) Educated at Rome. When a young man of twenty received from Cæsar the kingdom of Chalcis north of Galilee, and afterwards wider dominions. Became also the guardian of the temple and was allowed to appoint the high priest. Now a man of twenty-three. Knew the law and the prophets, and, in order to win popularity, **pretended to be a devoted Jew,** but at heart a **creature of Rome,** where his tastes and habits had been formed.

See him now on the chief seat in Festus' judgment-hall, as with haughty condescension he invites the Apostle to speak (v. 1).

II. **Paul's Defence.**—Raising his fettered hand Paul spoke with dignity and power. After a courteous beginning he set forth—

1. **His early life** (vv. 4-11).—A Pharisee of the strictest sect, as the Jews knew full well. Along with his kinsmen of the twelve tribes expecting the Messiah whom God had promised by His prophets. Believing like all of his sect in the resurrection of the dead, although now this belief is made a charge against him. A bitter persecutor of the disciples of Jesus both in Jerusalem and in other cities whither they fled. And this in full confidence that he was doing God's service.

2. **The Lord's gracious dealings** (vv. 12-21).—(*a*) Tells of his arrest on the way to Damascus, the bright light, the voice, the command (ix. 4-7), the message by Ananias (ix. 17), the vision of Jesus in the temple (xxii. 21). All are set forth together as **the Lord's call** to the great work of the Apostleship (vv. 16-18). (*b*) Tells of **his response to that call.** The

Master had called but not compelled. Paul might have refused his high calling, but he accepted it. The turning-point of his life, the great moment that decided his future, described in v. 19, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'

3. **His present position.**—The direct result of obedience to the Lord's commands. What had his obedience gained him? (*a*) **Hatred** from the Jews. Murderous plots and endeavours (v. 21). (*b*) **Captivity** from the Romans. There he stood in chains. Had he not been a Christian he would have been free. (*c*) **Help of God** that far outweighed those evils. God's guarding providence, sustaining grace, continual fellowship, special gifts, visions and revelations; and he had used those helps in **continually bearing witness to small and great**, to Jew and Greek, philosopher and barbarian, in synagogue and market-place, to the mob, and now to the governor and king. What did he testify (vv. 22, 23)? Only what the law and the prophets foretold—(*a*) That the Messiah should suffer. (*b*) That He should be the first-fruits of the resurrection from the dead. (*c*) That His resurrection should show light unto Jew and Gentile (1 Cor. xv. 20, 23; Luke ii. 32)

III. **The reception of Paul's Testimony.**—We have seen how Festus received it. To the heathen the idea of a resurrection was a wild one.

How was it with Agrippa? At first sat silent. The force of Paul's reasoning struck him. At that moment God's spirit was appealing to his soul. Then Paul put a direct question. What answer? Would he defer hearing more to a convenient season, like Felix and some of the Athenians? (xxiv. 25; xvii. 32). Or would he, like the Bereans, receive the word readily and search the Scriptures for himself? (xvii. 11). Alas! neither one nor the other, but a scornful sneer: '*With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian*' (v. 28, see Revised Version).

What caused Agrippa to answer thus?—Not ignorance of the law and the prophets (vv. 3, 27). Not entire ignorance of the Gospel (v. 26). The Christian Church was no secret society. Its beliefs open to all to hear and learn. But (1) **a heart hardened by pleasure.** No reason to suppose Agrippa ever felt inclined to accept the Gospel. The bare idea of exchanging his life of luxury and self-pleasing for a self-denying life like that of Paul would seem out of the question. (2) **Prejudice.** The name Christian still a term of reproach Agrippa probably a Sadducee. Laughed at the doctrine of a resurrection and despised its teachers. (3) **Pride.** Could not bear to think that this **poor Nazarene Apostle** should touch the heart of **him a prince.**

IV. **A noble Christian Reply.**—See Paul's final answer to Agrippa's sneer (v. 29, see Revised Version), '*I would to God that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am except these bonds.*' How courteous! how earnest! how tender in spirit! Full of the charity that 'seeketh not her own and is not easily provoked' (1 Cor. xiii. 5). What did the poor chained prisoner possess that those rich and great men had not?

1. **The light of the Gospel.**—His audience in darkness, some through ignorance, some through blind prejudice.

2. **A living faith in God.**—Believed that God was with him, his

Father and Friend, that Jesus died for him and rose again, and was with him alway, a living power in his heart (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4; Gal. ii. 20).

3. **Love to God and man.**—For all that he had suffered Paul cherished no bitter, revengeful thoughts, but only peace and goodwill.

4. **A glorious prospect.**—Life indeed was uncertain. He believed God willed him to see Rome. But what next? He knew not, cared not. Ready either to depart and be with Christ, which is far better (Phil. i. 23), or to tarry the Lord's leisure a little longer. He knew his place secure in the house of many mansions (John xiv. 2). With these true riches and honours conferred on him, Paul **envied none of his judges.** Would not change places with the best of them. **Only longed to make them sharers of his joy.** What part of his lot would Paul fain see them escape? His bonds. But did he count them free? Only in outward person. He knew they were in truth **less free than himself.** How was this? (*a*) **Their minds in the chains of ignorance** and darkness while he walked in the freedom of the truth (John viii. 32, 36). (*b*) **Their hearts in the bondage of sin and Satan.** He had entered on the glorious liberty of the children of God; the liberty of reconciliation, and willing, joyful obedience.

Unwilling that they should **share his bonds**, Paul longed and prayed to have them **share his liberty.** For, compared with it, all other freedom little more than a name.

Alas! this privilege was denied him. Agrippa died as he lived—a proud and traitorous Jew, after having helped the Roman forces to besiege Jerusalem. **Meanwhile Paul reaped one boon. What? He made clear his innocence** (v. 31). All were agreed as to that. Why then not set him free? Agrippa explains the reason (v. 32). Festus has now no choice but send him to Cæsar. Can neither acquit nor condemn.

Thus God's Providence at once guides Paul Romewards, and enables him to leave Judæa with a clear and honourable name.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Do not judge thoughtlessly by first appearances.**—We have seen how much better off Paul really was than Festus and Agrippa, though at first sight he seems to have all the hardship, and they the enjoyment and ease.

2. **In our own lives seek those things that are above.**—We may not be so ignorant as Festus, or so blind as Agrippa, and yet, through worldly selfishness, we may come, like Festus, to misunderstand earnest men and count their zeal folly, and, like Agrippa, to be scornful and proud towards the Gospel to our great loss. Strive and pray to be kept humble and wise, to choose the better part, and to place the things of God's kingdom first among life's aims.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The Revised Version renders it impossible to draw from v. 28 the lessons and warnings so long associated with this passage. Nothing is lost, however, if we use the revised rendering to show the contrast of character between the Christian Apostle and the proud Jew. Selfish pride and prejudice form as fit subjects for warning as the condition of one 'almost persuaded.' The lesson may be too long for a young class; in which case Paul's defence (II.) may be gone over lightly, and attention confined to I., III., and IV.

XXI.—THE SHIPWRECK

60 A.D.

Acts xxvii.

Introduction.—In former lessons we have seen the Apostle Paul undergo much trial and danger. Think of him at Damascus, at Lystra, at Thessalonica, at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Jerusalem. In every case two things plain. (1) Paul glorified his Master by brave and faithful conduct. (2) The Lord acknowledged His servant (*a*) by sustaining his spirit in peace and fortitude, (*b*) by preserving him in trouble, (*c*) by giving him honour and respect in the eyes of honest men.

To-day we read of another case as remarkable as any of these.

I. **The Voyage** (vv 1-13).—1. **The outset, Paul in favour.**—A vessel sailing from Cæsarea to Adramyttium by the ports of Asia. Festus sends Paul and a party of prisoners on their way to Rome, under care of a centurion and guard. Among Paul's fellow-passengers two Christian brethren, Aristarchus (v. 2; see xix. 29; xx. 4) and Luke, who writes this story. From the first the Apostle is treated with courtesy (v. 3). How is this? (*a*) Probably the centurion knows his peculiar case, not a criminal but a citizen who has appealed when he might have been set at liberty (xxvi. 31, 32). (*b*) Paul's personal character bright, cheerful, contented under trials (Phil. iv. 11, 12); full of sympathy and goodwill, wins the brave Roman's favour. He recognises qualities he can admire.

After touching at Sidon the ship sails northwards and westwards, between the island of Cyprus and Paul's native Cilicia (see map). Presently she arrives off Myra, but can take them no farther Romewards, so the centurion transfers his charge to a vessel of Alexandria bound for Italy with corn from Egypt.

2. **A ship in difficulties—Paul's advice heard but not taken.**—See the ship leaving Myra, a great vessel for those days, about 500 tons, though counted small by us now. On board 276 persons, viz. the captain or master and crew, Julius with his guard and prisoners, the owner of the vessel and probably of the cargo, with other passengers, a crowded company. For many days slow progress against head-winds. Instead of getting westwards at once towards Italy the ship beats up and down off the coast of Asia, and at last, driven out of her course, makes with difficulty the Fair Havens to the south of Crete, where she casts anchor to wait for a change of weather. **All this time Christ's Apostle is growing in the esteem of his fellow-voyagers.** How does that appear? Because prisoner though he be, Paul is now allowed to offer advice. An experienced voyager, he has been in peril of waters, thrice suffered shipwreck, spent a night and a day in the deep (2 Cor. xi. 25, 26). What does he advise (vv. 9, 10)? That they remain in that harbour for the winter. Why? Because the season had become too late for sailing. Nearly all voyages in those days confined to summer, and now October, for the fast or great Day of Atonement past. Stormy weather therefore must be expected, when sailing will be difficult and very dangerous. Why is not this advice accepted? Because (*a*) the harbour of Fair Havens, though safe, is not convenient to spend winter in. (*b*) The

captain and crew and owner of the vessel anxious to make an effort to reach Phenice, a much better port; think they may manage it; urge the centurion, and at last succeed in persuading him to let them risk it. (*c*) The weather moderates. A gentle south wind most tempting for the venture. **So Paul's advice set aside. Yet from how few prisoners would advice have been suffered at all.**

II. **The Storm** (vv. 14-26).—1. **Difficulties increase.**—Hardly have they set sail when Paul's judgment is proved sound. The wind changes. A north-east gale blows the ship off shore (v. 14). No chance now of making the harbour of Phenice. All they can do is to let her run before the gale, and make things on board as tight and secure as possible (v. 15). So the boat towing behind is got in, ropes are passed round the vessel's hull to prevent her planks from starting, all spare rigging is taken down, only enough sail left to steer by lest she drift on dangerous quicksands to the south (vv. 16, 17); still no improvement. So next day a quantity of cargo thrown overboard (v. 18); the day following, the ship's furniture goes (v. 19). But the prospect no brighter. Day after day a gloomy sky, pitch darkness at night, the sea raging furiously, the vessel labouring, groaning, creaking, plunging, always getting the more helpless and unmanageable; those on board in despair; no heart to eat, too anxious to sleep (v. 20).

2. **But now in the hour of peril the servant of God stands forth** (v. 21).—How has he been employed? No doubt helping and encouraging every one to the best of his power. But above all **diligent in prayer.** The higher rose the tempest and the greater the danger the closer has Paul drawn to the throne of grace; he has remembered God's promise to himself (xxiii. 11), and interceded for his helpless comrades. **And now he has his reward.** For see (*a*) his own soul encouraged and strengthened. No sign of fear or despair about him, the boldest man in that crew. (*b*) He speaks words of good cheer to others. In spite of the blunder committed in leaving Crete no life shall be lost, only the ship (vv. 21, 22). (*c*) Then he gives his reason for this assurance. God by His angel has told him in a vision that he himself shall reach Rome and also that all their lives on board are given to him—all to be spared for his sake (vv. 23, 24, 25, 26); but they must suffer shipwreck on an island.

III. **The Shipwreck—God's promise fulfilled** (vv. 27-44).—Fourteen days now since the vessel left Fair Havens. What a state all are in! Some no doubt cheered at heart by Paul's words. But in bodily condition how miserable! Drenched with water, cold, faint with hunger, wondering how long this is to last. And many still in despair. Suddenly through the night **a fresh alarm.** The sound of breakers ahead. They try with the lead, 20 fathoms; try again, 15 fathoms. Land must be near, but to go ashore in the darkness is certain destruction. So four anchors are cast from the stern and wearily all wait for the dawn. **Now see how the Christian Apostle has grown in influence and esteem.** His announcement has carried weight, for all now pay heed to him.

1. A cowardly trick about to be tried by the sailors (v. 30). How stopped (vv. 31, 32)? Detected by the Apostle and prevented on his advice. All were to be saved, but not without using due means and endeavours. God's deliverance was to be no encouragement to cowardly desertion of duty.

2. Next see the Apostle as the daylight at last broke on the scene. A great effort about to be made. All anxious and doubtful, captain, owner, centurion, sailors, soldiers, prisoners, passengers crowded together. Paul counsels and directs them. Let them take food, for hard work is before them, and forthwith, much as we can believe the Master would have done, he takes bread and gives thanks and sets the example of eating (vv. 31-35). Immediately his cool courage communicates itself to others and they do likewise. What gave the poor Jewish prisoner such power? (*a*) **He was a servant of God** and He had full trust in God's presence. Never forgot 'whose he was and whom he served.' (*b*) **He relied implicitly on the Lord's promise.** Believed that neither tempest, breakers, rocky shore, frail vessel, nor aught else could destroy one of the lives the Lord had 'given him.' (*c*) **He was full of kind thoughtfulness for others.** His own heart at peace in God, he was busy doing his Master's service, and the Master honoured him.

3. The final crisis. A desperate attempt made to run the vessel into a creek upon a patch of sandy beach. The ship gets unmanageable and strikes short of the shore. Confusion reigns; the vessel going to pieces; what do the soldiers propose (v. 42)? Why such wanton bloodshed? Because the guard answerable with their lives for the prisoners, and the strict Roman discipline would not take an excuse. But the centurion forbids the slaughter. Why? **Again because of the Christian Apostle.** God's servant on board saves from every danger. All feel how much they have owed him during those dark days, and the centurion cannot think of permitting violence. So the order is given, and soon the 276 men are struggling with the waves. How unlikely that all escape! Seldom has such a shipwreck happened without its victims. **But is there room for doubt here?** No. **The Lord has promised His Apostle all those lives** (v. 24). And the promise of God is yea and amen. Not one missing. All snatched from the jaws of death and safe ashore, because of the man of God in their midst.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

Learn in this lesson the **power of faith and prayer.** By them Paul lived in fellowship with God and so received the courage and tranquillity that distinguished him in this danger. You may never be tried by shipwreck and perils like these, but in the voyage of life you will all encounter danger and trials enough to test your courage to the full. If you would keep up your own heart and prove a help and strength to your neighbours, **live near to God.** Let your diligence in devotion, in service, in works of love, declare of you every day 'whose you are and whom you serve.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The help of a map is indispensable to the successful teaching of this lesson. While the stirring incidents of the voyage and shipwreck must be set forth as distinctly as possible, let the main object be to show how Christian faith and character shine brightly under the most trying circumstances. Show how Paul's personal influence due to his Christian helpfulness as much as to his courage and fortitude.

XXII.—PAUL'S JOURNEY TO, AND LIFE IN, ROME

61-63 A.D.

Acts xxviii.

Introduction.—Last Sunday we left St. Paul and his fellow-voyagers just escaped from a watery grave. Their deliverance was the fulfilment of God's promise to His Apostle. How did God bring it about? Chiefly through Paul's courage and wisdom, and the influence these gave him among his shipmates. But God had made a further promise to Paul; what? That he should go before Cæsar at Rome. To-day we shall see that promise brought towards fulfilment.

I. **The Island** (vv. 1-10).—Melita, now our own Malta in charge of a British garrison, then a wild spot; no town of any consequence; rude, unlettered inhabitants. The castaways received kindly; the poor islanders do their best to make them comfortable (v. 2).

How is it with Paul? Now as ever Paul shows his Christian character—honours his Master, and the Lord honours His faithful servant. How do we see this?

1. **A miracle wrought on Paul.**—On the ship Paul had set the example of cheerful courage, now he is forward in helpful service; cannot stand idle. 'He that is greatest let him be as the younger,' etc. (Luke xxii. 26). Suddenly a start of horror; what is the matter? A venomous snake has bitten the Apostle; all know the consequences—swelling, sickness, perhaps death. What do the islanders say (v. 4)? See what happens (v. 5). The Apostle none the worse. Not only the fulfilment of a promise to Paul, but of other promises too (Mark xvi. 18; Luke x. 19). What do the islanders think (v. 6)? As ignorant as the people of Lystra (xiv. 11). We may be assured that Paul was not long in setting them right.

2. **Miracles wrought by Paul.**—The Roman governor had shown kindness to God's servants; now he has his reward in this world (v. 8). No doubt he heard the Gospel too. We trust that he may have been brought to the light and received an eternal reward. What was the result of this miracle (v. 9)? Just as in the Lord's time on earth (Mark vi. 56). What did these miracles teach? (*a*) That Paul the servant of the Almighty. (*b*) The healing power of the Gospel. The cure of sick men's bodies was a parable of the cure of sick souls. From what disease? The deadly disease of sin; more fatal than any serpent-bite or sickness (John iii. 14).

3. **Paul departs in honour.**—After three months another corn ship from Alexandria, named after Castor and Pollux, the heathen seamen's guardian gods, receives Julius and his party (v. 11), and so this memorable visit comes to an end. No doubt the Melitan islanders heard the Gospel; and who can doubt that many believed? The miracles of healing of themselves show this. The bay where the ship cast ashore still pointed out as St. Paul's bay.

II. **Paul lands in Italy** (vv. 12-14).—A short voyage, touching at Syracuse and Rhegium (see map), brings the Castor and Pollux to Puteoli,

the great port in Italy for Egyptian corn ships. *The centurion's party land in March*, 61 A.D. Favour is still shown to the Apostle; how? A Christian Church has been formed at Puteoli, and Paul is allowed for seven days to rest and hold fellowship with the brethren.

III. **Rome at Last.**—'And so we went towards Rome,' writes St. Luke (v. 14). Rome at this time the capital of the world; upwards of two million inhabitants—about nine times the population of Edinburgh; three times that of Glasgow; like Edinburgh, built on hills and the houses very lofty, crowding the poor together; the great centre of law, order, and government. From the 'golden milestone' in the Forum or public market-place thirty great roads stretched north, south, and east to all parts of the empire. Along these roads troops and officials continually going and coming. Much commerce needed also to supply the wants of that great metropolis. Rome then growing rapidly in size and splendour, **but much in the city to grieve a Christian, and foretell disaster to a patriot.**

1. **A heathen city.**—Full of idols and temples; along with idolatry much degrading wickedness. Nearly as bad as Corinth.

2. **Citizens very idle** except those in military and public service. Others either rich and dissipated or else very poor, living on alms and paupers' allowances; despised honest industry; all the tradesmen and skilled artisans were slaves belonging to rich owners, and they made up half the population.

3. **Nero, a wicked emperor,** on the throne. A young man given to self-indulgence and cruelty of every kind; had not yet filled up the measure of his wickedness, but already his brother and mother had been murdered by his orders, and he was about to put away his wife.

Many Jews then at Rome, settled in a quarter by themselves on the banks of the river Tiber. A number of synagogues stood there. **The Church of Christ had been planted at Rome for several years,** perhaps by some of the 'strangers of Rome' who received gifts at Pentecost (ii. 10). The Roman Church well known for its faith and devotion (Rom. i. 8). Paul often longed to see the brethren there, and give and receive spiritual sympathy (Rom. i. 10-12); had written this great epistle three years ago.

And now see the little band of soldiers and prisoners travelling along the great Appian Way towards the imperial city. Who would suppose that the elderly captive of small stature and careworn countenance is the ambassador of the King of kings, leader in a band that should yet overthrow Rome's heathenism and bring all the empire to acknowledge their Master as Lord, and to honour Paul His servant, and that band the despised sect of the Nazarenes? But what saith the Scriptures (1 Cor. i. 27-29)? How various the thoughts of that company of travellers! The soldiers glad to return from foreign service, looking forward to telling friends the story of their adventures; the prisoners, some in dread, some hopeful of release; the Apostle wearied with the long journey, firm in faith, but depressed in spirit, thinking of the trials before him, and uncertain of his fate. But now he is again cheered and encouraged; how? God has sent two parties of brethren from Rome; one party meet him at the village of Appii Forum, forty miles from the city; the other at The Three Taverns, ten miles nearer. Arrived at the city, what became of the Apostle? Julius gave over his

charge to the captain of the guard—Burrhus, a just and noble officer, and we see Paul receive every indulgence a prisoner could be allowed. Still chained to a soldier, but permitted to live in a lodging of his own and to see his friends (v. 16).

IV. **Paul's first Testimony at Rome** (vv. 17-29).—Now as ever, to the Jews first. Already Paul had poured forth at length his heart's great longing for his own nation (Rom. ix., x., xi.) Now he invites the leading Jews to his house and explains his position to them (vv. 17-20). How is he received? What is the result (v. 24)? But the greater part doubtful or unbelieving, for Paul's testimony is against them (vv. 25-28; see Isa. vi. 9; Matt. xiii. 14, 15). How had the Jews reached this unhappy state? Through their wilful blindness and pride. So once more Paul turns to the Gentiles.

V. **The two Years' Captivity** (vv. 30, 31).—Why so long? Because the emperor was not ready to hear Paul's case sooner. Time needed also to make inquiries and give witnesses opportunity to come forward. How did Paul spend those years?

1. In preaching the Gospel to all who came to hear him, 'Christ's ambassador in bonds.' Many converts made, some even from Cæsar's household, a place of great difficulty for a Christian to live in (Phil. iv. 22).

2. In writing letters of counsel and encouragement to various Churches. The Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon written there. Next lesson we may further see how it fared with him.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. **Learn to prize your high calling as Christians.** We are all proud of our place as British subjects, citizens of a great empire; yet the proudest empire may pass away as Rome did long ago. But God has called us to be **citizens of a kingdom that cannot be moved.**

2. **In the Lord's service strive to make the best of all circumstances.** We have seen Paul witness faithfully for Christ in the tossing ship, among the islanders, and in his chains at Rome. In each place he was able to do notable service in spite of disadvantages. Remember the Lord knows our trials in every position where He places us; nowhere is it impossible to serve and glorify Him.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The teacher's aim with a young class should be to keep before their minds (1) the fact of God's guiding hand ever smoothing Paul's way in the fulfilment of the divine promise that he should reach Rome; (2) the continual witness for Christ the Apostle maintained in a variety of trying surroundings; (3) the assurance of triumph in the purity, truth, and love of the Gospel contrasted with the error and wickedness of heathen Rome. Point out that for all Cæsar's might and Paul's weakness, Christ's cause must win.

XXIII.—PAUL DRAWING NEAR DEATH

63-68 A.D.

2 Tim. iv. 6-18

Introduction.—We have now followed St. Paul throughout his wonderful career of service for twenty-six years, since his conversion to Christ. In last lesson we left him a prisoner at Rome, living in his own house, but chained to a soldier night and day. How occupied? In constant labours for the Master's cause. (1) Preaching the Gospel and giving wise Christian counsel to all who visited him. His fame spread in Rome. (2) Writing letters of advice to brethren at a distance. We have seen four of these,—viz. Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, addressed to Churches, and one to Philemon, a friend whose runaway slave Onesimus had been brought to Christ by Paul, and was now to return to his master's service.

I. **An interval of Freedom.**—At last, after two years of waiting, Paul was tried, found innocent of sedition and all crime, and set at liberty. What did he do next? Nothing known for certain; but good reason to believe—

1. That this liberty lasted for five years.

2. That Paul visited Macedonia, Ephesus, Colossæ, and other Asian Churches; thence travelled westwards to Spain, where he stayed for nearly two years; and after that returned to the East, and visited Crete, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece. In all preaching Christ and confirming the faith.

3. That he set Timothy, his faithful friend, as 'overseer' or chief pastor of the Church at Ephesus, and Titus over that at Crete, and to each he wrote a letter of counsel warning them against false teachers, who should draw their flocks away from Christ, and encouraging them to be brave and earnest in the Lord's cause.

4. That during those five years the Church of Christ grew mightily. In every nation in the civilised world, and among many barbarians, the Gospel had now been proclaimed and the Church planted.

II. **Again taken Prisoner.**—What occasioned this? The Emperor Nero had increased in wicked cruelty. Taking advantage of a great fire at Rome he accused the Christians of trying to burn the city. A terrible persecution followed. To be a Christian became a crime. Hundreds put to death. Some thrown to the lions in the amphitheatre, some wrapped in deer-skins and torn by hounds, some wrapped in pitch and burned alive. A dreadful time of trial. Paul escaped those terrors at Rome, but his enemies too bitter to let him alone. Now that Christians so much disliked, their opportunity has come. Paul arrested, probably at Ephesus, on the accusation of Alexander, the coppersmith, an old Jewish adversary (Acts xix. 33; 2 Tim. iv. 14). Brought to Rome again to be tried for his life.

III. **Three striking Scenes remain for our Study.**—1. **Paul's 'first answer'** (v. 16).—See the Apostle in the hall of Nero. See the judges, the accuser, the lawyers, and court officials, all in state. The prisoner, an old man, worn with toil and travel and care. **No friend or**

advocate near him. Where are all the brethren that used to frequent his house five years ago? Alas! some dead, some fled, and the faithful ones absent on duty. 'No man stood by me, but all men forsook me' (v. 16). No advocate dare plead his cause; no Christian at Rome dare attend at his side. What does he pray (v. 16)? Full of compassion for human weakness. **But did Paul feel forsaken?** Not at all. The Master, in whose presence and fellowship Paul lived, who already had appeared to him at times of need in visions (Acts xxii. 17; xxiii. 11), did not now forsake His servant. Paul felt Him by him strengthening and upholding (v. 17). With what effect? This at least. (*a*) That brilliant assembly for once heard the Gospel fully and faithfully preached. (*b*) Paul successfully answered the first charge against him. 'Delivered out of the mouth of the lion.' From the lions in the amphitheatre, if the charge referred to the burning of the city. In any case from the death-sentence of Nero, cruel and furious as a hungry beast of prey.

Thus the first answer successful. But is Paul set free? No; other answers yet to be given. Meanwhile the Apostle sent back to prison.

2. **The final testimony.**—Once more we see the Apostle in prison. No longer under favour in his own hired house, but 'suffering trouble as an evil-doer, even unto bonds' (2 Tim. ii. 9). Probably in a dark foul dungeon of a great prison. **Still friends may visit him. But where are they? Demas,** afraid of death or ruin, gone to Thessalonica (v. 10; Matt. xvi. 25-27). Others sent on missions to distant quarters—**Erastus** to Corinth; **Tychicus** to Ephesus; **Crescens** to Galatia; **Titus** to Dalmatia (v. 10); **the brethren from Asia,** then at Rome, gone in a body. Afraid to come near him (i. 15). Only one now able and willing to cheer and ease his lot. **Luke, the beloved physician** (v. 11; Col. iv. 14).

How is Paul occupied? Writing this letter to Timothy at Ephesus. He longs once more to see his son in the faith, and hopes Timothy may be in time. He also desires to see Mark, no longer a burden but a help.

But what is Paul's own state of mind?

(*a*) **He knows his death is near** (v. 6).—Though escaped for the moment, his foes too determined to let him go, and now before Nero's cruel tyranny the just Roman law is powerless.

(*b*) **Knowing this he looks back on the course of his life.**—His early bigotry and errors; his conversion; his 'obedience to the heavenly vision' (Acts xxvi. 19); his disputes in the synagogues; his preaching in the schools and market-places; his prayers, and tears, and anxieties; his perils in the city, in the wilderness, among false brethren, among Jews, among heathen; his fastings, and cold, and nakedness; his struggles with weariness, and sickness, and poverty, often for daily bread; his temptations to despair—all rise before his mind. A wondrous history; and he writes, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith' (v. 7). Even Paul's humble modesty could say no less.

(*c*) **He looks forward to the prize of his high calling.**—And what is that? The crown of righteousness (v. 8). A day appears to Paul's eye of faith on which he shall stand, not before the corrupt Felix, or the ignorant Festus, or the proud Agrippa, or the cruel Nero, but before the Lord, the righteous Judge. And he shall then receive no taunts, or scorn, or threats, but **the crown which is righteousness. What crown is that?**

To be made **perfect in Christ,** to have Christ's work in him **crowned with completion;** no more striving with sin and frailty; no more shortcoming, and repentance, and sorrow. No more hindrance and pain from 'the body of this death' (Rom. vii. 24), but perfect freedom in unbroken fellowship and service. And then to hear the Master's voice, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' To see Him as He is and to be like Him, conformed to His image. No wonder Paul's tone becomes triumphant. **And see the ground of his assurance of this blessing and triumph.** 'I know whom I have believed.'

3. **Set free.**—History tells us of one more brief scene. Soon after this testimony, Paul was condemned to death; but, as a Roman citizen, to death with honour. One day a party of soldiers, with Paul in their midst, pass out beyond the city gates to the spot that now forms the Protestant cemetery. It does not look like a triumphal march; yet only **One** procession on this earth has better deserved the name. Arrived at the destined spot, the prisoner kneels, the headsman's sword flashes, and in a moment Paul's sufferings are ended; his faithful spirit gone to be with Christ, which is far better; his body, 'still united to Christ, doth rest in the grave till the resurrection.'

PRACTICAL LESSON

For whom does Paul declare the crown of righteousness to be laid up by the Lord? Not for himself only, but 'for all them also that love His appearing.' Do you love His appearing? Would it be good news for you to hear that He was coming to-day? If so, why? It can only be because you are fighting a good fight, and running your course, and keeping the faith. None others have any cause to love His appearing. But, perhaps, it would not be good news. You dread His appearing, and would rather not think of it. Remember, that will not defer it for an hour. The fight must be fought, else cruel enemies will enslave and destroy us. The race must be run if we would escape calamity. Paul has shown us the way. Not in our own strength, but in the Master's. With patience. Looking unto Jesus—the Author and Finisher of our faith.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

This is the most solemn lesson of this course, and should be taught accordingly. With young classes in Grade I. it may be found too much to go over the whole. These, therefore, may begin at Section II. The Apostle's memories and anticipations, his present forlorn condition and glorious prospect in the near future can be dwelt upon with great interest and effect. The practical lesson will then follow naturally and with power.

LESSONS FROM THE EPISTLES

XXIV.—JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Rom. v.; Gal. ii. 15-21; iii. 21-29

'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. v. 1)

Introductory.—How may any one wishing to teach others do so? He may teach by **words**, as you are being taught now, or by **writing**. You have been hearing of a great teacher—St. Paul. How did he teach? By **words**. He went from place to place like a missionary. [Refer back to St. Paul's three missionary journeys, and some of the principal cities which he visited.] This could not go on. Too many places and Churches for one man always to be visiting. Besides, he was imprisoned in Cæsarea—Rome. So what did he do? He wrote epistles—that is, **letters.**

You like to get letters. If father or mother away, they write to you, tell you what they are doing, what they wish you to do. So St. Paul's disciples—friends—would be very glad to get letters from him, in which he advised, encouraged, taught them.

We are going to try and learn some lessons from these letters, for they are intended for us too.

Read in class Rom. v. 1-11.

Sketch of Lesson.—To-day our lesson is from the letter which stands first of the letters in the Bible, although not written first. Whom was it written to? To the **Romans**. Yes, and to the children of Edinburgh, Glasgow, of this Sunday School, to you. When St. Paul wrote it he had not yet been in Rome, but was hoping much to go (Rom. i. 10, 11). Did he ever go? [Lessons XXII., XXIII.] In the meantime sent a letter. And one great truth in it, which he repeats over and over again, in our text for to-day. [Let children repeat the text.] Let us try to understand it. To do so we must remember two things about those to whom St. Paul was writing.

1. **They had sinned** (Rom. iii. 23; v. 8, 12, 19-21, etc.) [Illustrate by particular sins—forgetfulness of God, disobedience, selfishness, unkindness.]

2. **They were trying to find forgiveness for themselves.**—Instead of asking God to forgive them, they thought they could gain forgiveness by their own good deeds. Could they? If you do something wrong to-day—tell a lie, act unkindly—will a good deed done to-morrow blot the bad deed quite out? No. It will show you are sorry, that is all. [Tell story of boy who drove a nail into a post for every bad deed he did, and pulled one out for every good deed, but who found that even when nails were all out, the **marks** remained.] So with Romans. Many, sorry for sin, tried hard to keep the law, but marks of old sins still there. **They** could not blot them out. Who could? **God** could. That what St. Paul taught them in our text. It tells us of three things:—

I. **Of Peace with God.**—'*We have peace with God.*' You know that peace can only come from pardon, forgiveness. When we have done wrong we are restless, unhappy. But when forgiven, what a change! So if we have peace with God, it can only be because God has forgiven us. And God is ever ready to forgive. We often forget this, and think of God as harsh, severe, like man in parable (Luke xix. 21). When we think thus of God, we are afraid of Him. Our sin makes us afraid; we wish to hide ourselves from God, like Adam and Eve in garden (Gen. iii. 8). This is wrong. God is seeking us just as He sought Adam and Eve. He wishes us to come to Him to be forgiven. He loves us even though we have sinned. Look at two texts in this chapter (Rom. v. 8, 10). Can you repeat any other texts which tell of God's love? John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10, 16, etc. And if God loves us so much, will He not be ready to forgive? You forgive those whom you love; it is when you **don't** love that you can't forgive. But **how** can God forgive? God is an all-holy God. All sins are hateful to Him; the little sins, unkind words, etc., you think so little of, as much as great sins. And so all sins must make us at dispeace with God—what St. Paul calls '*enemies*' to God (Rom. v. 8). And yet, as we have seen, our text tells us of **peace with God.** Where does this peace come from? The text goes on to tell us.

II. **By whom Peace comes.**—'*Through our Lord Jesus Christ.*' Who was the Lord Jesus Christ? He was God's own Son. So what we learn is that God loved us so much, He was so anxious that our sins should be forgiven, that He sent His own Son to make peace for us. What did Jesus do? He came down from heaven to our earth; He lived as a baby, a child, a man upon the earth, always good and pure and holy—no sin in Him; and at last He died upon the Cross, and rose again, and ascended into heaven. Why all this? Why this cruel death and this glorious resurrection and ascension? All this for us,—for each one of us,—that He might save us from sin, from all its guilty stains, and bring us back to God. This is being justified. It is not for anything we have done or can do that God forgives us, but for what Jesus has done. Let me tell you of a man who learned this. He was a Roman citizen; but did not live at Rome, but at Philippi. He was a jailer. What disagreeable work! it would besides make him hard; he would hear much of sin, become accustomed to it. One night strange thing happened in prison. [Describe scene, Acts xvi. 25-29.] What did jailer do—ask? He was afraid, anxious. What did disciples answer? Not 'Show your sorrow for how you have treated us,' but '*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*' That the first thing. He needed a Saviour, and Jesus was ready to be a Saviour to him, bad though he had been, if only he would believe in Him. Did he believe? Yes, and because of his belief—his faith—he was saved. And this may help us to understand a third and last truth from our text.

III. **How Peace—Forgiveness may be ours.**—It is not enough to know that God is ready to forgive us, and that He does forgive us because of what Jesus has done; we must know also **how** we are to make sure of that forgiveness for ourselves. And what does the text say—'*being justified by faith . . .*'? What does faith mean? Faith means **trust.** You know what it is to trust your mother. You do what she tells you to do, even though it is not very

pleasant, because she knows what is best for you. Or you trust the doctor, and take the medicine he says will make you better. Medicine will not do you any good, unless you **take** it. So we are to trust Jesus and take the forgiveness which He offers us. If I were to offer each one of you a watch, and say, 'I have got that watch for you; it is yours if you will only take it,' you would be very foolish if you did not trust me, and put out your hand and take your watch. How much more foolish if you do not take what Jesus offers, when He knows so well what you need! Look then to Him as dying Israelites looked to serpent (Old Testament, Lesson XVIII.) Think of all He has done for us. That will teach us how much He loves, how ready He is to forgive, and how, because He is God's own Son, His death takes away all our sin.

LESSONS

Apply the truths of text very simply:—

(1) **We have all sinned.**—We know that. Who of us does not remember sins committed against God, against one another? Tell me some sins. [Here teacher may indicate some of besetting sins of which he knows the scholars to be guilty.] Will not then our sins separate us from God? They would, but (2) **God has provided a remedy for sin.**—Who? Jesus. Because of what Jesus has done, we are forgiven. His blood washes out every stain. How eager then we should be to go to Him and ask forgiveness? We can go, because He has told us to come. Where? Matt. xix. 14.

And when we come, Jesus not only forgives us, He helps us to be good, and not sin more. Can we be good of ourselves? Have you ever tried? If so, found it impossible. But Jesus knows how weak we are. He can make us strong. We shall hear more of this next Sunday. To-day do not forget this—**We need forgiveness, and the only way to find it is to come to Jesus.**

What does your hymn say?

'Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The teachers may find it impossible to teach all that is in this lesson in the time allowed; in that case they might concentrate the children's attention on **peace** and **forgiveness.** Great care must be taken not to confuse the minds of the children by the use of such words as **justification** and **faith** unless explained by their equivalents.

XXV.—LIFE IN CHRIST

Rom. viii.

'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death' (Rom. viii. 2).

Introductory.—Last Sunday we were thinking about **peace with God, forgiveness**; learnt two things about it. We all need it. God gives it to us for Jesus Christ's sake. But is forgiveness all that we need? Think. When you have done wrong, not enough to hear father say, 'I forgive you'—you wish him also to **receive** you back as his own obedient, loving child. (Compare story of the prodigal; Luke xv. 11-32. His past sin forgiven, and he himself received again as a *son* into his father's house.) That is what Jesus secures for us. He is our '**way**' back to our Heavenly Father. In Him we can begin life over again, as if we had never been disobedient, selfish. And more, He can help us to overcome sin—make us 'more than conquerors.' Hear of this in our lesson to-day.

Read in class Rom. viii. 1, 2, 14-17, 31-39.

Sketch of Lesson.—There is much in these verses children cannot understand now—learn the meaning of as they grow older. But this all can understand, that those who love Jesus, and trust in Him, have many blessings, and are kept safe from many dangers. What a *difference* between a dirty, ragged, starved street boy—no one to care for him—and the same boy washed and clothed and fed, received into a happy home; like two different boys, not one. So a great difference between children who try to care for themselves, *live by themselves*, and the same children when they trust in Jesus, *live in Him*. We are going to think about this '**life in Christ**,' but may understand it better if we think first of another life.

I. **Life.**—All know what that is. God has given us life. He keeps us **in life.** How much we need! Our *bodies* require air, food, clothing. You cannot get these for yourselves—too young—too weak. If a baby or little child left all to himself, he would die. But God has filled your parents' hearts with love to you; given them the means of providing for you. So too our *minds*. They must be cared for—taught. Perhaps you do not wish to go to school, but parents, teachers, know what is best for you. When older you will thank them because they chose for you. Once more, our *wills*. We all like our own way; not good for us to get it. A child thinks how nice if allowed to do exactly what he liked. Quite the reverse. Spoilt and self-willed children never happy. If then **left to ourselves**, our lives would be very sad. How thankful we should be because in everyday life we have parents, friends to provide for us, show us what we ought to do! Now learn that as bodies and minds and wills are cared for, so God cares for our *souls*, has sent Jesus Christ that we may live new, happy lives in Him.

II. **Life in Christ.**—Our new life is (1) *begun in Christ*. When God created Adam and Eve, He created them good. Did they continue so? The devil tempted them—how?—and they forgot God's love. Their trust

and obedience gone. Their hearts no longer pure and holy, but sinful. And so when Adam and Eve had little children, their hearts, like their parents', sinful too. The same with all children since. We are born with sin in our hearts. But what did God do? He sent Jesus 'to save sinners' (1 Tim. i. 15), to take away our bad hearts, and give us new and clean hearts. That is what Jesus means when He says we must be '**born again.**' He says it to every one—even to wise old men like Nicodemus (John iii. 3). One way in which always reminded of this. **Baptism.** What is baptism a sign of? Of washing. From what? From sin. Yes, and also of our beginning a new **life in Christ** (Rom. vi. 4; Gal. iii. 27; also Catechism, Question 94). So baby gets its *Christian* name to show that it is Christ's, and going to follow Christ. [Refer back to former illustration; boy picked up from street, or African or Indian child received into a school—makes a fresh start, sometimes gets a new name.] But it is not enough that this new life should be begun in Christ.

It is (2) *continued in Christ.* We have seen how miserable a little child would be left to itself. So a Christian child needs to live 'in Christ' **always,** if it is to do what is right. Not enough to make a good beginning, we must **go on,** trusting in Jesus, and looking to Jesus every day for help. That is what St. Paul means when he says, 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God' (Rom. viii. 14). You know what it is to be **led.** When a child very young, the mother or nurse leads him that he may not fall. So Jesus always leading His children. Can we see Him? No. But He is very near to us—far nearer than we think. And He puts His Spirit into our hearts to teach us and help us. When we speak a kind word, that is the Holy Spirit speaking in us. When we are made strong to resist some evil, that again the work of the Holy Spirit. Do we **need to be led?** Think what has happened since last Sunday. Perhaps when you heard of the love of Jesus then, you thought, 'I will always be kind and loving and obedient to please Jesus.' Have you been so? We are so weak. We pray every day, 'Give us this day our *daily* bread,' to keep our **bodies** alive; so need to ask Jesus *every day* for new life and strength to keep our **souls** alive. If we do not, we shall soon forget Him altogether. [Story of painter who painted picture of little child, called it **Innocence;** and years after another picture of a wicked, desperate man, called it **Guilt;** then found that the child and the man were *the same.*] But if we go on trusting in Jesus, praying to Him, His Spirit will make us 'free from the law of sin' [specify particular sins] 'and death.'

For our life is (3) *ended in Christ.* Death was the punishment God sent into the world when Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. iii. 3; Rom. v. 15). But Jesus came to save us not only from sin, but **from death** (Rom. v. 17; compare John v. 24, 25; Eph. ii. 5). If Jesus be in us, if we are **living in Him,** then, even though our bodies die because of sin, our spirits will **live** because of the holiness of Jesus, the holiness which He gives to us (vv. 10, 11). We think of death as separating us from those we love, even from the love of Jesus Himself. Does it really? Rom. viii. 38, 39. If we love and trust Jesus, death only like a door by which we pass out of this world into another world to live with Him for ever. [Illustrate. Here we are like bird imprisoned in a cage. When door opened, we dart out to be *free* again.] Do not forget

that Jesus is near His children in hour of death—He is drawing them to Himself.

All know what David sang (Ps. xxiii. 4, 6)—

'Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill:
For Thou art with me; and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

. . . . . .

'Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me:
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be.'

Recapitulate.—**Two lives** are possible to every one—a life in which they **trust in themselves**, and choose their own way; or a life in which they **trust in Jesus**, and choose His way. Which life are you leading? Remember you must make up your minds—cannot walk on two roads—cannot serve two masters. Which is the better Master—**self** or **Jesus?** Listen to what a great missionary (Zinzendorf) said, when only four years old: 'Be thou mine, dear Saviour, and I will be Thine,' or what another (Livingstone) wrote on his last birthday: 'Let not Satan prevail over me, oh, my good Lord Jesus!'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The teacher will probably find this a very difficult lesson to teach, from the abstract nature of its subject, and because much with which it deals is outside the ordinary experience of children. An attempt has been made in the sketch to work out the subject somewhat in detail; but the teacher may find it better to confine himself to the broad contrast between a '**life in self**' and a '**life in Christ**,' suggested in the Recapitulation.

XXVI.—OUR LIVING SACRIFICE

Rom. xii.

'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service' (Rom. xii. 1).

Introductory.—There is a very beautiful picture which represents the head of Jesus crowned with thorns, and with a look of pain and suffering on His face. Underneath the picture these words are written, 'I have done this for thee; what hast thou done for Me?' What does that picture teach us? Two things. (1) It reminds us of all that Jesus **did** and **suffered for us**, and of His love so great that He even died for us. (2) Then asks us a question, **How** are we showing **our love** to Jesus? What are we doing for Him? This what we are to think about to-day. In our last two lessons we have learnt—what? what **Jesus** did for us. To-day learn what **we** are to do for Him.

St. Paul tells us about it in this chapter, which begins a new part of his letter. In the first part (chaps. i.-xi.) he has been writing to his Roman friends about the love and mercy of Jesus to them. They have been forgiven. In Jesus their new lives are begun and continued and ended. Then he pauses —begins a new part. If all this so, surely the Romans should show their love to Jesus—'I beseech you therefore, brethren . . .'

Read in class Rom. xii.

Sketch of Lesson.—Let us come back to v. 1, 'I beseech you . . .' What does that mean? This—that as Jesus was once offered a 'sacrifice for sins,' so there is also a **sacrifice for us** to offer. Think of—

I. **A Sacrifice.**—What is a sacrifice?

When Noah with his family saved from the flood, what did he do? Gen. viii. 20. Why? He wished to show his **thankfulness** to God for having saved them. So Abraham. What did God command him? Gen. xxii. 2. Did God really mean him to kill his son? No, but wished to see whether he loved Him more than Isaac, and would sacrifice his **will** to God's will. Or one more sacrifice (Exod. xii. 3-17). Why was the **lamb** killed and the blood sprinkled? Because the Israelites had **sinned**—were deserving of death; but God promised that if they sacrificed the lamb, it would be **accepted** instead of them—they would be 'passed over.'

Would not some be sure to ask, How can a lamb save us? So taught to look forward to time when God would send Jesus to be the true 'sacrifice for sins.'

II. **Jesus, our Sacrifice.**—We are taught this very often in the Bible. Take one place in the gospels which connects Jesus with the Passover. John the Baptist standing with two of his disciples beside the river Jordan—perhaps sees flocks of lambs being driven across the fords to go to Jerusalem for approaching Passover—catches sight of Jesus, and says, 'Behold the **Lamb** of God . . .' (John i. 29). Jesus the true Passover Lamb. He will do what no other lamb can do—take away sin. So too one

whole letter (to the Hebrews) in the New Testament written to teach us this. Hear of this letter again (Lesson XXXVII.), but remember now that it tells us that Jesus is the true, the only real **sacrifice for sin** (Heb. ix. 26 ; x. 12). Was it a light, an easy thing for Jesus to die? How did He die? Why did He die? For us—each one of us—to **save** us from death. How much then we should love Him? [Illustrate. If a boy saved you from drowning, you would be grateful—wish to show your gratitude in some way.] 'We love Him, because He first loved us' (1 John iv. 19). But **how** show our love to Jesus?

III. **Our Sacrifice for Jesus.**—This does not mean that anything we do can save us from our sins—Jesus alone can do that; but that just as Noah offered a sacrifice to show his thankfulness, or Abraham to show his obedience, so, because Jesus died for our sins, we are to present our thank-offering of obedience and love to Him. What is this offering?

1. **It is the sacrifice of ourselves.**—(1) *Our bodies.* Who made our bodies? God. And when sin made our bodies prisoners, who bought us back and set us free? God's own Son. So our bodies belong to God (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). We must take care of them for Him—keep them **holy** —safe from harm and pure from sin. If any one gave you a precious jar or stone, how carefully you would keep it! And then do not forget Jesus lives in our bodies by His holy Spirit (Lesson XXV.) As we keep the *church* holy, because it is God's dwelling-place, so must keep our *bodies* holy, because they are the temples of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. vi. 19 ; 2 Cor. vi. 16). Do not forget your bodies are **not your own**. They belong to Jesus ; must be kept holy, and pure, and beautiful for Him. Sin makes our bodies ugly. Is a child with a cross or angry face beautiful? Jesus likes bright, happy faces. Remember nothing too small to do for Him. A child always bright, clean, tidy, offering a true **sacrifice** to Him. (2) *Our minds.* Our minds too belong to Jesus. We must train them for Him. This chapter speaks of 'not slothful in business.' What is business? Tell me any one in business (doctor, lawyer, shopkeeper, servant, etc.) You cannot work like them just now. What then is your business? To go to school—learn your lessons—prepare yourselves to be good doctors, servants, etc., when you grow up. That your **sacrifice** again. When you sit down to learn your lessons, say, 'I am going to learn this lesson as well as ever I can, to please—' whom? your mother, teacher. Yes, and to please—'**Jesus.**' (3) *Our hearts.* A verse in Bible which says, 'My son, give Me thine heart' (Prov. xxiii. 26). Jesus saying that to every child in this class to-day. This something you can all give. Jesus does not ask you to give Him money, clothes ; He wants **yourselves**. [Story of poor Indian, wishing to please God, offered in turn to missionary for God, his belt, his booty taken in the field, his wife and child, everything he had. All rejected. Then he said, 'Then, Lord, take poor Indian too.' That offering accepted.] This the most difficult offering of all. Like to choose our own way, do what pleases ourselves, instead of what pleases Jesus. Try to conquer your wills, be loving, obedient children. That the best **gift** for Jesus ; will make Him very happy.

2. **It is a living sacrifice.**—Have already learnt that, because it is the sacrifice of ourselves. But because living, it is also a **daily** sacrifice. What

does that mean? We are not to try to please Jesus only on Sunday in church, or in the Sunday School, but every day at home, at school, at play. Try always so to speak and act that your parents, teachers, companions, may say, 'These are Jesus' children, because they are trying to follow Jesus' example, and to be kind and gentle and good as He was' (compare scene, Acts iv. 13). Say—

'I shall then show forth Thy praise;
Serve Thee all my happy days;
Then the world shall always see
Christ, the holy Child, in me.'

3. **It is a reasonable service.**—Have all heard about Pharaoh? What did he make children of Israel do? Exod. i. 14; v. 10. He was a cruel, hard oppressor. His service was 'with rigour.' How different with Jesus! He does not ask any one to do what they cannot do. What did He say Himself? Matt. xi. 30. So St. Paul says, 'All have different gifts, opportunities; use them.' You cannot be ministers, or teachers, or rulers just now, but you can 'abhor that which is evil,' put away all bad thoughts and words and deeds, 'be kindly affectioned one to another,' 'heap coals of fire,' etc. That a 'reasonable service.' **Do what you can** (compare story, Mark xiv. 8). All can do something, maybe very little; that does not matter. Do **it**.

'With smiles of peace, and looks of love,
Light in our dwellings we may make;
Bid kind good-humour brighten there,
And still do all for Jesus' sake.'

Two questions for each one of us—

1. What has Jesus done for me?
2. What am I doing for Jesus?

XXVII.—THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

1 Cor. i. 18-31; 2 Cor. v. 12-21

'We preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. i. 23)

Introductory.—When we have been staying anywhere with friends, we like to get letters from them, telling us what they have been doing since we left; and we write to them in answer, recalling what we talked of, and did, when we were together. We have heard before of St. Paul's visit to Corinth [Lesson XV.], and how he taught many there to love and serve the Lord Jesus about whom he preached. But after St. Paul went away, no longer the same love and peace among the Christians at Corinth, but envyings and other sins. And so some of his old friends wrote to him asking him what they ought to do. What a sad letter for him to receive! It is now lost, but we have St. Paul's two letters in answer; and to-day and in our next four lessons we are going to hear what he wrote to the Corinthians. And to-day we shall hear how in both letters he reminds them of one great truth he had preached specially about in Corinth, and which, if they had only remembered it, would have kept them from sinning.

Read in class 1 Cor. i. 18-31; 2 Cor. v. 14-21.

All these verses may be summed up in one text —only four words, '*We preach Christ crucified*' (1 Cor. i. 23). Let us see what it may teach us.

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **The Preacher.**—How nice it would be if we could see a picture of what St. Paul was really like when he first went to Corinth! That not possible, but from the book of Acts and these two letters we can learn a few things about him. He was **alone** (Acts xvii. 15; xviii. 5). That always made him sad (2 Cor. ii. 13). He was also **ill.** We do not know what his illness was, perhaps something wrong with his eyes, as in Galatia (Gal. iv. 13-15). Enough, at any rate, to make him weak and depressed (1 Cor. ii. 3). And he was poor, '**in want**' (2 Cor. xi. 9), had to work hard with his hands to earn a living (Acts xviii. 3). Surely then St. Paul had enough to do to think of himself, and all his own troubles. But no, he never did that. Like his Master, Jesus, he '*pleased not himself*' (Rom. xv. 3)—thought only of others, his fellow-countrymen, the Jews in Corinth, who did not believe in Jesus as he did, and the Greeks, living carelessly in pleasure and sin. All these were really worse off and poorer than he. He knew what they did not; and so 'in the synagogue every Sabbath,' and privately, we may be sure, every day in the house, the workshop, or the street, he preached and he taught, trying to persuade the Jews and the Greeks.

II. **His Message.**—What was it? What did St. Paul preach about? A great many things, but one thing above all. '*We preach Christ crucified*' (compare 1 Cor. ii. 2). St. Paul told the Corinthians over and over again, that they might not forget it, what you have heard so often—that Jesus, God's own Son, in His great love for men, came down from heaven to earth, and '*took upon Him the form of a servant*,' and '*humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death*' (Phil. ii. 7, 8). He told them what kind of a death

it was that Jesus died—how on 'a green hill far away' He was nailed to a wooden **cross**, and hung up between two thieves, while the soldiers and the cruel people stood round, and mocked, and laughed. And yet how all the time Jesus was meek and loving, and even prayed for those who were crucifying Him. And he told them **why** Jesus had died. Not for His own sins, because He '*did no sin*,' but for **their** sins—and **our** sins, the sins of each one of us.

'He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.'

All that St. Paul means when he says that he preached '*Christ crucified*.' What good news it is! A sick man is glad when the doctor tells him how he may be made well again; a prisoner is glad when the judge tells him that he may go free. So all should be glad when they hear of the Saviour who '*died for their sins*'—and so made them whole and free.

III. **How the Message was received in Corinth.**—1. **Some believed.** Who do you think they were? They were those who felt in their hearts that they had sinned, that they had forgotten God, and not loved one another as they ought. And who were sorry, and wished to be forgiven, and helped not to sin again. Some great men among them, like Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue (Acts xviii. 8). But more poor, weak, ignorant men and women (1 Cor. i. 26, 27), thieves and drunkards even (1 Cor. vi. 9-11). No one had cared for them before. But now they had heard of one who was their Saviour; for who were they whom Jesus came to save (Matt. ix. 13; xviii. 11)? Children too. How glad many boys and girls in Corinth must have been to hear about the kind Jesus who loved them, and died for them! But—

2. **Others believed not.** The Jews said, 'We have been looking for a great king and conqueror to come and save us. But this Jesus you tell us about died like a slave upon a cross. We cannot believe in Him.' And the Greeks said, 'We like wisdom, not this simple story, which even poor, ignorant people and little children can understand. It is so simple that we think it foolish.' And so these Jews and Greeks would not listen to St. Paul's preaching. The **cross** stood in their way. That was what happened in Corinth long ago. But think—

IV. **How are we receiving the Message?**—Remember St. Paul is preaching in these letters to us too,—preaching the same great truth, the cross of Jesus. So must ask ourselves, Are we like those who believed, or those who believed not? Are we **glad** because Jesus died for us, or do we not care? Let me tell you how a man felt who heard the story of the cross for the first time. He was a rich, powerful man; had come from a distant country to worship at Jerusalem; on his way home read in his chariot about one who was coming to die. He could not understand the message. But God sent a teacher to him [describe scene, Acts viii. 29-34], and he '*preached unto him Jesus*,' told him just what we have been learning to-day, and the rich man '*went on his way rejoicing*.' How many opportunities we have had that this man had not—Bibles, churches, Sunday Schools, etc.

Are we **glad** as he was? You are very fond of singing 'Tell me the old, old story.' Why? Many reasons, but is not this the best?—

'Remember, I'm the sinner
Whom Jesus came to save.'

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. A lesson of **love.** '*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*' (John xv. 13). You may not be quite sure that a person loves you when he says so, but when he shows his love by his **life,** by kind, loving deeds, even by his **death,** then no mistake. That what Jesus did. You say—

'Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.'

But what more?—

'Jesus, from His throne on high,
Came into this world to die;
That I might from sin be free,
Bled and died upon the tree.'

2. A lesson of **duty.** If Jesus died on the cross for us, we must '*take up our cross*' and follow Jesus. How? Long ago a great many children, roused by a shepherd boy, called Stephen, who had been preaching the Cross to them, set out to Jerusalem with crosses and banners, singing as they went, 'O Lord, help us to recover Thy true and holy cross!' Nothing could keep them back. Many died on the way—others sold as slaves—few ever saw their homes again. We cannot go on a crusade like that. Jesus does not ask us to go. But we can go on a crusade at **home,** at **school,** be kind and loving and self-denying as Jesus was, that is '*to take up our cross.*'

'There's not a child so small and weak,
But has his little cross to take,—
His little work of love and praise
That he may do for Jesus' sake.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The teacher who wishes more time for the practical lessons may find it best to omit Division III., and concentrate the children's minds on the meaning of the Cross for themselves, as suggested in Division IV. It cannot, however, be too strongly urged that on a subject such as this the simple presentation of the fact is its own best teaching.

XXVIII.—CHRISTIAN LOVE

1 Cor. xiii.; 1 John iv. 7-21

'The greatest of these is love' (1 Cor. xiii. 13, R.V.)

Introductory.—Have you ever wondered what is the greatest and best thing in the world? Many different answers. Riches, power, knowledge, long life—all these great and good things when wisely used. If I were to tell you where you might find them, how glad you would be, how eagerly you would seek them! But to-day we are going to hear of something better still than all these—something better even than faith and hope—something which St. Paul tells us is **the greatest thing** in the whole world—something too which even the youngest child in this class may have. Listen while we read about it, and try to find out what it is.

Read in class 1 Cor. xiii. You know now the greatest thing in the world is—**Love.**

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **Love—the greatest Thing.**

(1) All know **what** love is; not easy to explain in words, but you understand what I mean when I say, 'Your mother loves you,' or, 'You love your mother.' Or think of it this way. We saw last Sunday that people at Corinth, when St. Paul wrote to them, were not loving one another, but that pride and envy and boasting had appeared among them. How? Some more clever than others, able to speak more eloquently, to prophesy. Now these were great gifts, and St. Paul said, 'Seek them, be glad to have them, but do not forget that by themselves they are not enough. No use to be eloquent or clever unless you are **loving** too.' So for us. Not enough to know all the Bible stories, to be able to repeat a great many verses and hymns, to put pennies in missionary box, if we do these things only because we wish to gain praise for ourselves; must do them **because we love**, and wish to show our love.

For remember (2) love, and not wisdom, riches, etc., **makes us like God.** God wishes us to be like Him, and only by love can we be that. Why? Another Apostle has told us—the Apostle of love. Who was he? St. John. Hear what he wrote when a very old man. *Read in class* 1 John iv. 7-11. Why, it is all about love! If you count, you will find that St. John uses the word 'love' nineteen times in fifteen verses (vv. 7-21). And what is it that he says? If you wish to be like God, then you must **love.** Wisdom makes us like a wise man; strength like a strong man; so love makes us like God, for '*God is love.*' If for no other reason then love is the greatest and best thing in the world, because it makes us like the Greatest and Best in the world—God.

(3) But another reason why love is so great is because of what **it does.** By our love we **show others** that we are God's children. When Jesus gave His last messages to disciples, He gave them a **sign** by which all men would know who they were, not a strange dress like the old prophets' (2 Kings i. 8; Matt. iii. 4), not a pulpit gown like a minister's, not a card, like card of Band of Hope. No; something different from all these—something no one could mistake. The sign was **love.** John xiii. 35. So people when they saw first disciples used to say, 'Behold how these Christians love

one another!' They knew they were Christians because they loved. And more than this, love **teaches others to love** Jesus too. If you wish to make a person love you, how do it best? By loving him. Man asked why everybody loved him, replied, 'Because I love everybody.' No power so strong as the power of love. That is why a baby or a little child has often so much power in a house—it rules by love. [Illustrate by Norman Macleod's *Wee Davie*, or such well-known stories as *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.] And this will help us to understand how, even though love is so great a thing, every one here may have it and show it. For what does St. Paul tell us about showing love?

II. **How we are to show Love.**—St. Paul does not say, If you wish to show you love Jesus, go and teach and preach like the Apostles, or go and give money to poor people, or go and give your '*body to be burned*.' Long ago some people thought the best way to please Jesus was to die for Him. [Illustrate. The boy Origen whose mother had to hide his clothes to prevent him going to prison and death.] But what does he say? *Read again* 1 Cor. xiii. 4-7. St. Paul tells us fifteen different ways of showing love, which all can understand. Tell me them. We cannot speak about them all; notice four only.

1. Love '**is kind.**' Think of a Bible story which teaches kindness. Luke x. 30-37. '*Go, and do thou likewise.*' How? By helping wounded men? Probably never a chance of that, but by helping your mother when she is tired, by kind words or deeds to your younger brothers or sisters.

2. Love '**envieth not.**' What a black, bad thing envy is! How unhappy it makes yourself and others! When you see another scholar getting prize, must not grudge it; be glad he has succeeded, tell him so. Jonathan still loved David, though he knew he was to be king instead of him (1 Sam. xx. 31, 32).

3. Love '**seeketh not her own**'—is unselfish. Remember the golden rule (Matt. vii. 12). Who is the great example of unselfishness (John xiii. 15)? (Compare Rom. xv. 3; 2 Cor. viii. 9.)

4. Love '**hopeth all things.**' Perhaps you know a boy, careless, unforgiving. Parent or teacher says he is 'hopeless,' so bad. Don't believe that; conquer him by love. Jesus did not give up St. Peter when he denied Him—won him by a look, so sad, but so loving (Luke xxii. 61).

III. **Where we can get Love.**—God alone can give us true love, for '*God is love*,' and all love comes from Him. You must think of God's love, go on thinking of it, '*keep yourselves*' in it (Jude 21), as you keep yourselves in the sun; and then God's love, like the sun, will shine down into your hearts, and make them warm and loving like His own. '*We love, because He first loved us*' (1 John iv. 19, Revised Version). God's love is the **cause** of all our love—our love to Him, our love to one another. And think especially of God's love shown to us in Jesus Christ! We saw in our last lesson what that love was—the love of the **cross** (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10). When we think of that love can we help loving? [Illustrate. A little German girl finding a scrap of the translation of the Bible Luther was making with the words on it, '*God so loved the world that He gave*'—that was all; she did not know what God gave, but because God loved she knew it must be something very good, and so her heart was filled

with joy and love. Or this incident. 'Edward Irving went to see a dying boy once, and said, "My boy, God loves you," and went away; and the boy started from his bed, and called out to the people in the house, "God loves me! God loves me!" It changed that boy.']

Recapitulate.—What then is the greatest thing in the world? **Love.** Yes; that the one truth of our lesson—**Love.** Are you showing it? Are you children of love? Beautiful story about St. John that shortly before his death, when he had to be carried to church in the arms of his disciples, all he could say was, 'Little children, love one another.' The disciples, wearied with hearing always the same words, asked, 'Master, why dost thou always say this?' 'It is the Lord's command,' he replied, 'and if only this be done, it is enough.'

'My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth' (1 John iii. 18).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Throughout this lesson the word 'love' has been substituted for 'charity' of the Authorised Version of 1 Cor. xiii. If the teacher follows this, it may be well to explain the change which has come over the meaning of 'charity,' limiting it largely to 'almsgiving.' The omission of '*Him*' in the Revised Version of 1 John iv. 19 is noteworthy. It makes the statement quite general—'*we love, because*,' etc. An excellent exercise for classes would be to find Scripture illustrations of the fifteen characteristics of love mentioned in 1 Cor. xiii. 4-7. On the whole subject Professor H. Drummond's little book, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, will be found suggestive. The following experience is noteworthy:—'I remember that some time ago, addressing one of the largest Sunday Schools in Lincolnshire, I asked the assembled children whether God loved them when they were wicked. Some of those boys and girls answered "No," and some answered "Yes." There was evidently a great difference of opinion among them on the point; and I am afraid that the majority believed that God did not love them when they were wicked. It was a startling revelation of the extent to which even our trained Sunday scholars fail to understand the Gospel of the love of God. If God did not love them when they were wicked, He could never love them.' *The Philanthropy of God*, by Rev. H. Price Hughes, p. 9.

XXIX.—THE RESURRECTION

1 Cor. xv.

'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept' (1 Cor. xv. 20)

Introductory.—Do you remember what our lesson was about, two Sundays ago? The cross of Christ. We learned that even though we had sinned God still loved us, and sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us. That is the meaning of the cross. We cannot think of it without thinking of the greatness of God's love. And then last Sunday we saw how, because 'God is love,' we should love too. Love is the greatest and best of all the commandments, because it makes us like God. Have you been trying to love during the past week—keeping yourselves in God's love, and then showing that love to others? To-day our lesson is about a very different subject—**the Resurrection**—a long word; it means 'rising again,' especially 'rising again from the dead.' You have been at a funeral—seen coffin with body in it lowered into earth—grave filled up—grass and flowers placed on top—body left to crumble into dust; and have wondered perhaps, 'Is that the end? shall we never see our father, or brother, or friend again? Bible says, No; that not the end. Hour is coming when '*all that are in the graves shall hear Christ's voice, and shall come forth*' (John v. 28, 29). Now there were some people in Corinth who did not understand or believe that, and so St. Paul wrote this chapter to explain to them about this resurrection, or rising again. Let us hear what he said.

Read in class 1 Cor. xv. 1-26.

Sketch of Lesson.—Let us take one verse out of this lesson; it will help us to understand all the rest—v. 20. Repeat it. What is the first truth that verse teaches us? This: that—

I. **Christ is risen.**—'*Now is Christ risen from the dead.*' Suppose I were to ask you to do some difficult thing, and you said it was impossible—what could I do? Tell you, perhaps, of some other boy or girl who had done it already—showed it was possible. That was what Paul did with the Corinthians. They said, 'We cannot rise from the dead.' Paul said, 'How foolish you are! Christ has risen; and because He rose, you shall rise too.' Corinthians had often heard of the resurrection of Jesus; they believed in it, but needed to hear of it again and again, so as to understand all it meant. How often we need to hear the same lesson before we remember it! Think how did Paul and the Corinthians know that Jesus had risen. For best of reasons; because a great many people had seen Him—spoken to Him—walked with Him. [Illustrate. Parents do not know where boy is; friends come and say they have seen him in ——— (name adjoining street or town or village); know where to look for him now.] Tell me about some of the people who saw Jesus after He rose from the dead. Peter; how glad he must have been when Jesus came to see him—showed he was forgiven! James—one of Jesus' own brothers—had not believed in Jesus before, believed now. Yes; and any others we read of in the gospels? The Apostles, and then Paul himself. When did he see the risen Jesus (Acts ix. 5)? He never forgot

that vision—speaks of it again and again. If you look at Paul's sermons in the book of Acts, or at his letters, you will find them full of this great truth—'Christ is risen.' Does not seem as if he could ever say enough about it. It made him so **glad**, he wished it to make others glad too. (One hymn in Hymnal (No. 54) every line of which ends with Hallelujah! Why?) And now let us think of one great reason **why** the resurrection of Jesus should make us so glad; what does text say? Repeat. The second truth we learn is that—

II. **We shall rise too.**—Christ is '*become the first-fruits of them that are asleep*' (Revised Version). Who are they? The dead; and Paul speaks of them as **asleep** because they shall awake again. Hear more of this beautiful name for death in another lesson (Lesson XXXV.) Think rather just now of the strange name Paul gives to Jesus—'*the first-fruits.*' Try to understand what that means. Suppose you go into a field newly ploughed; all black earth—how dead-looking! and even after seed sown, at first no sign of life; but wait a little; gradually a few green blades begin to appear above the earth—show you that some day whole field will be covered with corn. Then in autumn, while most of field still green, discover in some sunny corner a few ears of corn yellow and ripe. Then you know whole field will soon be ripe. These few ripe ears are the **first-fruits** because first ripe, and because show us that rest will ripen too. [Long ago the Jews used to offer the first ripe ears of corn in their fields as an offering to God. Paul would be thinking of that when he wrote our text.] So in lesson to-day hear of another field from which some day a great harvest will be gathered; what field is that? The world. What happens to all people in world? They die; are buried, like seed buried in dark earth. Why is this (Gen. iii. 3, 19)? But who conquered sin and death? And because Jesus died and rose again, He is '*the first-fruits,*' showing what will happen to all His children. '*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*'

But because Christ is the first-fruits we learn something more; we learn—

III. **What our risen Body will be like.**—Think of first-fruits again. They show what rest of field will be **like**; if they are barley, then field barley; if wheat, then field wheat, etc. Or take flower-seeds. Perhaps when you plant them do not know what kind of seeds they are. But when first flower comes out, you know that other flowers will be like it. So risen Jesus teaches us **what we shall be like** when we rise. What like was Jesus? He was the **same**. Disciples knew Him, recognised His voice, etc. (John xxi.) [Let scholars illustrate by further particulars from the gospels.] But He was also **changed**—came suddenly, vanished suddenly (John xx. 19; Luke xxiv. 31). [Illustrate further, as above.] The same Jesus, but with a body that no longer knew hunger or thirst or weariness,—that is the risen Jesus we read about. So with us. When we rise our **bodies** will be the **same**, but also **changed**. We shall be able to know one another, recognise our friends, etc., but '*we shall all be changed.*' Our bodies no longer sinful, weak, sickly as here. They shall be made like to the '*glorious body*' of Jesus (Phil. iii. 21).

We do not know **how** this change shall be worked. Paul calls it '*a mystery,*' like the mystery of the grub turning into the butterfly, or the

little dark seed into the flower. But the same God whose power works these great changes can work a change in us too.

Recapitulate.—Christ is risen. Because Christ is risen, we shall rise too. When we rise we shall be made like Him. What great promises! how happy they should make us! Yes; but remember to whom these promises are made. To Jesus' children—to those who are trying to be **like Jesus** now, who are setting His example before them, and walking in His footsteps. Are you doing that? Only those who love Jesus will be **glad** to see Him when He comes. What then does Paul say to us all?—v. 58.

'Finish, then, Thy new creation!
Pure and spotless let us be:
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee!
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

As little reference as possible has been made in the lesson to the *controversy* in the Corinthian Church regarding the Resurrection, as unsuitable and unnecessary in the instruction of very young children. The different heads into which the sketch is divided are, it should always be remembered, more for the teacher's guidance than for the scholar's, and need not be explicitly announced to the class unless thought desirable. In speaking of the resurrection of the body, care must be taken to avoid giving the impression that all the identical fragments of the human body will be brought together at the resurrection day—'the body dies as the seed dies, and our resurrection bodies shall differ as the grain differs with the nature of the sown seed, or as one star differs from another in glory.' Teachers who have access to them should read in the first series of Mrs. Gatty's *Parables from Nature* the two entitled 'A Lesson of Faith' and 'Not lost but gone before,' as bearing upon the subject of the lesson.

XXX.—EXHORTATION TO LIBERAL GIVING

2 Cor. viii. 1-15; ix.

'Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver' (2 Cor. ix. 7)

Introductory.—Do you remember why St. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians? Lesson XXVII., Introductory. How anxious he would be to get an answer! He set off from Ephesus, where he had written it, to Troas, then to Macedonia, to meet his messenger Titus returning (2 Cor. ii. 12, 13); had '*no rest*' until he heard how Corinthians had received his message (2 Cor. vii. 5). At length Titus came. The news he brought was good—not altogether so, but chiefly good. So St. Paul wrote a second letter to tell the Corinthians how thankful he was. And besides another reason. In his first letter he had asked them to help him by giving money for poor people in Jerusalem (1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2); wished now to stir them up. Let us hear what he said.

Read in class 2 Cor. ix.

Sketch of Lesson.—Our lesson to-day is about **liberal giving**. Let us think about—

I. **The Duty of Giving.**—All know what giving means. You get something, and instead of keeping it all to yourself, you give a part of it away. When you give a great deal, thinking more about other persons than yourself, that is to give liberally. [Boy sharing his apple with another said, 'Bite bigger, Billy.'] The Corinthians had received a great deal from the Jews. The good news they had been learning (Lessons XXVII.-XXIX.) had all come to them through Jews. St. Paul himself, their great teacher, was a Jew, so he said, 'You should do something for the Jews. Many very poor people in Jerusalem; food there too very dear from famine (Acts xi. 28), but you can send them some money to help them.' So now many very poor people cannot get food for themselves or their children. Many too in India, Africa, even here in Scotland, who have never heard about God or about Jesus Christ. How nice if we could help these people by giving them what they need! Perhaps you are thinking, What use telling us that? Wait till we are grown men and women, then we can give, but now only little children. True, you cannot give much just now, but all can help. [Illustrate. Jacob's resolve, Gen. xxviii. 22.]

II. **How we should give.**—Three rules.

1. **We should give something.**—It does not matter how little it is, or what it is, so long as it is ours, and we give it for others. If you cannot give **money**, can give **time** [show how child may give a little of his playtime to help at home or a companion with his lessons] or **work** [by attending children's working-parties, etc.] Like Israelites when Moses adorning the tabernacle; all men, women, children brought something. (Exod. xxxv.) Remember, what we give should be something we shall really miss. Like David (2 Sam. xxiii. 13-17; xxiv. 20-24). Every little counts. Old saying, 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care

of themselves.' No one knows how much good the smallest gift of money or love may do.

'Every little mite,
Every little measure,
Helps to spread the light,
Helps to swell the treasure.
God entrusts to all
Talents few or many;
None so young and small
That they have not any.'

2. **We should give as God has enabled us.**—What does text say? '*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart.*' St. Paul meant that Corinthians should **think** how much each could give, and give that. He did not expect the poor Corinthians to give as much as the rich Corinthians, but all to give according to their **means** (compare again Exod. xxxv.) Your pennies quite as precious in God's sight as others' pounds. Why did Jesus say that the poor widow with her two mites gave more than the rich who cast in much (Mark xii. 41-44)? Think too of Mary anointing Jesus with ointment (Mark xiv. 1-9). Why was He so pleased? '*She hath done what she could.*' That the chief thing; each do, give **what he can.**

3. **We should give willingly.**—'*God loveth a cheerful giver.*' Suppose some one gave you a present, but unwillingly, grudgingly; you would not like it, rather not have it at all. So God cannot like gifts given with a grudge. The **love** in a gift makes it precious. How pleased we are to get any gift, however small, from those we love, and to give them a gift in return! How great and loving God's gifts to us are! (Acts xvii. 25; John iii. 16). God Himself is a willing, cheerful giver, and He wishes us to be willing, cheerful givers too (compare Exod. xxv. 2; xxxv. 5).

These then are three rules about giving. Let me tell you a story to help you to remember them. Once at a missionary meeting of negroes in the West Indies these rules were agreed upon, and a negro took a sheet of paper to put down what each gave. Some gave more, others less. One rich old man threw down a small silver coin. 'No,' said the negro, 'that is according to the first rule, but not according to the second.' (Why not?) The old man took up the coin, came back, angrily threw down a valuable gold coin. 'No,' said the negro again, 'that won't do yet. That is according to the first and second rules, but not according to the last.' Once more the man picked up his gift, this time returned, put down a large sum with a smile on his face. 'That will do,' said the negro; 'that is according to all the rules.'

We have learned **how** we should give; think now—

III. Why we should give.

1. **Because of the good example of others.**—*Read* 2 Cor. viii. 1-3. The Macedonian Churches, though very poor, had been very generous. St. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow their example. A help to us to have good examples to copy; shows us what we can do, what we ought to do. [Illustrate. Headings in writing-book, copies in drawing; or this story. Once a new church to be built in America, meeting held, but people poor;

[illegible] could not be raised. A day or two afterwards a little boy, Charlie, came to minister with a few bricks he had begged from some masons for new church. Another meeting was held, the bricks placed on a table, and their story told. Sight of them stirred the people up. Charlie's good example was followed, and the church was built.]

2. **Because of what Christ has done for us.**—*Read* 2 Cor. viii. 9. Here a reason all can understand. We know what the Corinthians knew, that Christ, 'though He was rich,' gave up all the glory and peace and joy of heaven, and '*became poor*.'

'He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall.'

Then when a man what did He say of Himself? (Matt. viii. 20. Compare Hymn 383.) And all this was '*for your sakes*.' How ready we should be to give what we can **for Christ's sake!** For do not forget, everything we give to help others, if in the right spirit, is given to Christ Himself (Matt. xxv. 40).

3. **Because what we give brings a great reward.**—*Read* 2 Cor. ix. 6. St. Paul says giving is like sowing seed. When you sow corn, you look much **more** than you sowed. The more you sow the richer the harvest. So if you 'scatter seeds of kindness,' will reap a rich harvest of kindness and love to your own and others' hearts (compare Matt. x. 42). God looks at the **love** which made you give, and returns you **more love.** That way Jesus said, '*It is more blessed to give than to receive*' (Acts xx. 35).

'Mission-box penny! No pearl of the sea
[illegible]
To the heart of the wretched most comfort and calm,
To the wounded spirit a healing balm;
Seed for the day of eternity,
Lambs gathered in for the Good Shepherd's keeping;
As the stars of the firmament, bright and many,
[illegible] Mission-box penny!'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

[illegible] a lesson which will mean children must largely be taught by illustration. Examples are given above, but should [illegible] to teachers in the course of their own experience [illegible] more likely to prove effective. In this connection teachers may be reminded of the advantage of [illegible] the consideration of the next Sunday's lesson prior to the end of the week, [illegible] the subject at any rate before [illegible] during the whole week. In this way different methods of explaining and illustrating will naturally suggest themselves.

XXXI.—STRONGER THROUGH TRIAL

2 Cor. xii. 1-10; Heb. xii. 1-12; Jas. i. 2-4; 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13

'My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. xii. 9)

Introductory.—Always interesting to hear about the life of any great or good man. [Instance any biographies known to the children.] Some men have themselves written the story of their lives for us—told us what difficulties they had to face, what strengthened them, etc. How interesting if St. Paul had written his life in that way! He has not done so, but has told us a great deal about himself in his letters; in no letter more than in his second letter to the Corinthians. In our lesson to-day, then, we are going to hear about St. Paul himself, rather than about the Corinthians to whom he was writing.

Read in class 2 Cor. xii. 1-10.

Sketch of Lesson.—In first six verses of this chapter St. Paul tells us about the visions—the strange and wonderful sights which God allowed him to see. What was his first great vision (Acts ix. 3)? After that he saw others—does not tell us what—but very wonderful, like St. John's visions, of which we shall hear before long (Lessons XXXIX., XL.) St. Paul says he might boast about all he had seen, but does not mean to do that. If he does boast, would rather boast about all that he had suffered—his trials, his weakness. That surely a strange reason for boasting! We shall hear afterwards why, but think first what St. Paul's trials were.

I. **The Trials of St. Paul.**—When you think of St. Paul, you must not forget that his life was often very hard, sometimes very sad. What makes your lives happy? Your homes, friends, etc. How different with St. Paul! He had no fixed **home.** [Like Whom? (Matt. viii. 20).] When a boy, lived in beautiful Tarsus, studied in Jerusalem; but after he began to preach about Jesus, had to leave his home—like our own missionaries [name missionaries]—travelled about from place to place in constant danger (2 Cor. xi. 26, 27). Then about his **friends.** St. Paul was very affectionate, fond of his friends, but could never stay long with them. You would not like to be always seeing strange faces—how lonely when you first go to a new school! Besides, St. Paul had a great many **enemies**—always watching him, trying to find him doing something wrong, spreading false stories about him, etc. Hear what happened (2 Cor. xi. 23-25). One thing more; he had '*a thorn in the flesh.*' We do not quite know what it was; likely some bodily illness; perhaps weakness of eyes (from comparison of Acts ix. 9; Gal. iv. 15, etc.); very painful at any rate; made the Apostle very weak and ill. How hard for him then to go on working, travelling! When ill, you are glad to stay at home, not learn lessons. That not possible for St. Paul—always thinking about others—had '*the care of all the churches*' (2 Cor. xi. 28).

II. **What St. Paul learned from his Trials.**—1. Suppose you wish to

make your arms stronger, you must try them, practise them at gymnastics, etc. Or if you wish to be a good runner, must try your speed constantly. So with our **trust** in God. If it is to become **stronger**, better, it must be **tried.** And difficulties, illness, etc., do that. How? Think. Your mother loves you always, but some children only find out how much they are loved when ill. Their mother watching by them, sitting up all night, etc. No doubt about her love then. So St. Paul, when weak and ill, found out how great God's love was, for God gave him the help and strength he needed. [Let children repeat the text given above.] He learned **to trust God more.**

2. Another reason; have you ever thought why you are punished? Not because your parents or teachers like to do it—it often pains them more than you. [Illustrate. Father about to punish his son burst into tears. The boy exclaimed, 'Father, whip me as much as you please, but don't cry.'] But they punish you for your **good**, to correct your faults, to make you better and happier. Never forget, it grieves God to send trials, sufferings to His children. But He sends them from love (Heb. xii. 6), to cure us of our sins, and to make us fruitful in good works (Heb. xii. 11; Jas. i. 2-4). That what St. Paul found. His trials helped him to avoid sins displeasing to God—perhaps vanity, conceit; and taught him what God liked—patience, humility, etc. So he learned **to be holier.**

III. **How St. Paul was upheld in his Trials.**—(1) What did he do? Look at 2 Cor. xii. 8. He **prayed.** St. Paul knew who alone could **help** him, so he looked up to Jesus in heaven, telling all his troubles. That is what Jesus wishes us to do. Sometimes children think when they are in need of any kind, that is not the right time to come to Jesus. How foolish! When do you run most readily for your mother's help? Is it not when you are sick or in trouble? That the time too to call upon Jesus. When we are **weak** like St. Paul, then He is most ready to make us **strong.** (2) How? How did Jesus answer St. Paul's prayer? Not by taking '*the thorn*' away, but by making him strong to **bear** it. He gave him '*grace sufficient*' for his need. So we must not grumble if Jesus does not at once take our sickness, sorrow, etc., away when we pray to Him. He knows what is **best** for us. [Deaf and dumb boy—asked, 'Why were you born deaf and dumb, while I can hear and speak?' wrote down in answer, '*Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.*'] And if we submit to His will, He will help us to bear every trial He sends. (3) Think of Jesus' own **example** while He was on earth—'*Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses*' (Matt. viii. 17). He was made '*perfect through sufferings*' (Heb. ii. 10). So now in heaven He **knows** all your little difficulties, sorrows, etc.—**feels** for you—can **help** you. What does your Paraphrase say?—

'Though now ascended up on high,
He bends on earth a brother's eye;
Partaker of the human name,
He knows the frailty of our frame.

. . . . .

'With boldness, therefore, at the throne,
Let us make all our sorrows known;
And ask the aids of heavenly power
To help us in the evil hour.'

Remember then—

All trials come from God.
He sends them for our good.
He will give us strength to bear them.

HINTS TO TEACHERS

Anything in the form of biography is always interesting to children; and an effort has been made to interest them in the somewhat abstract subject of this lesson by connecting it as much as possible with the personal life of St. Paul. At the same time it must not be forgotten that even children have trials of their own, and cannot be taught too early where to look themselves for sympathy and help.

XXXII.—WORKS OF THE FLESH AND FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Gal. v. 16-26

'This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh' (Gal. v. 16)

Introductory.—We heard in last lesson how St. Paul learned to '*take pleasure in infirmities*,' because of what they taught him about God's love and power. Hear now how the Apostle's trials were the means of others being taught too. When St. Paul was on second missionary journey, he passed through Galatia, did not mean to stay there, but taken ill and could not travel (Gal. iv. 13). But though ill St. Paul was not idle. He taught the Galatians the same great truth he proclaimed everywhere,—the Cross of Christ (Gal. iii. 1). At first they received his message eagerly and joyfully; but, when three years afterwards the Apostle came again, they were not pleased because he told them of their sins (Gal. iv. 16). We do not know that St. Paul ever saw them again, but he heard bad accounts of them, so wrote them a letter,—a very stern letter,—no praise in it, as in all St. Paul's other letters. Our lesson to-day is taken from it, but first let us think a little more about the Galatians themselves, it will help us to understand our verses better when we read them.

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **The Galatians to whom St. Paul was writing.** —We have heard what a good **start** they made when first they heard about Jesus. St. Paul himself says, '*Ye did run well*' (Gal. v. 7). They were like racers running to a goal, and started so well that they seemed certain to reach it. But then the sad part. They did not **go on running** well for long, —they got tired, thought about other things than the race, listened to other teachers rather than remembered what St. Paul had told them. All that made St. Paul very sad. He wondered that the Galatians had changed so quickly (Gal. i. 6), thought they must have been '*bewitched*' (Gal. iii. 1). Think. Do you never disappoint your teachers in the same way? How many good starts you have made! How often you have promised to try to overcome some bad fault! Then how often you have turned aside and forgotten. Remember that is very sad for your teachers; makes them feel what St. Paul felt, that they have bestowed '*labour in vain*' (Gal iv. 11). They are '*perplexed about you*' (Gal. iv. 20, Revised Version), and begin to wonder if any use teaching at all. But, on the other hand, how happy it makes teachers if they find children attentive, remembering what they hear and really trying to do what is right! If then any of you been like the Galatians, careless, fickle, not running with all your heart, make a **new beginning** to-day. And St. Paul tells you, as he told the Galatians, how you may do that. Listen while we read what he says.

II. **What St. Paul wrote to the Galatians.**

Read in class Gal. v. 16-26.

We learn three things from these verses.

1. **The works of the flesh we are to avoid.**—Read again vv. 19-21. Many sins there of which you know nothing, and into which we pray you will never fall. And of other sins, like murder, drunkenness, perhaps you say, 'Oh, we could never do things like those!' But that very likely was just what the Galatians thought: yet they fell. Not all at once, we may be sure, but little by little; one sin would lead on to another. Think how a **sin grows.** First it is just a little **thought**, so little that it does not seem to matter at all. Then we find it nice to think it, and go on thinking it, until it gets fixed in our mind. Then the thought becomes a **wish**; we wish to do this wrong thing we have been thinking about. And then the wish becomes an **act**. We do it, and having done it once, we do it a second and a third time, and every time it becomes easier, until at last it becomes a **habit**, and we can hardly help doing it, even if we do not wish to. [The teacher should illustrate this growth of sin by particular examples—Temper, Disobedience, Untruthfulness, etc. Compare also the fall of Adam and Eve.] How terrible to be '*the slaves of sin*,' obliged to do sin's bidding, and finding our sins stronger than ourselves! [Arab fable of a camel who asked leave to put his nose into a miller's tent. The miller said, 'Yes, you may put in your nose.' Camel did so; then asked, 'May I put in one of my feet?' The miller agreed again. And so gradually the camel got in his neck, his body, until he got in altogether and turned the man out.] Here then the great lesson for us. Do not forget, 'no one becomes very wicked **all at once.**' The worst man was once an innocent little child. [Recall illustration of Innocence and Guilt, Lesson XXV., Division II.] How important then for children to resist at the very beginning! Beware of the very **smallest** sins. All bad thoughts and words and deeds are '*works of the flesh*' which we must avoid.

2. **The fruit of the Spirit we are to show.**—Read again vv. 22, 23. St. Paul did not only tell the Galatians what they were **not to do**; he told them also very clearly what kind of people they were **to be.** That too very necessary for us to know. You would not like if your parents or teachers were always saying, 'Don't do this' or 'Don't do that,' 'Don't be cross,' 'Don't be envious,' etc. Pleasanter when they tell us, 'Be kind,' 'Be gentle,' etc. [The Old and New Testament commandments may be contrasted in this particular. 'In the Old Testament it is, "Don't! don't! don't!" In the New Testament it is, "Do! do! do!"'] We cannot think about all the fruits of the Spirit, but notice how **simple** they are, and how they may be shown by youngest child. **Love:** we have heard about it already, Lesson XXVIII. How many remember what we then heard? More important, how many have been trying to be loving? Were there no unkind, cross words at school, at home, last week? Then **joy.** Some children think God does not like to see them happy. That quite wrong. Your mother likes to see you happy because she loves you, and God, who loves you more even than your mother, does the same. The more you love God and try to serve Him, the happier you will be. It is sin makes people sad. Then **temperance.** Are any here members of Band of Hope? Then you know what you have promised. But temperance means a great deal more than 'total abstinence from intoxicating drinks.' A **greedy** child is an intemperate child. You know how when a man is going to run a race, he trains himself, is very careful not to eat or to drink too much

So St. Paul in another letter tells us that if we wish to win in our race, we must be '*temperate in all things*' (1 Cor. ix. 25). One thing more we can learn from these verses; it is in our text. Repeat.

3. '**Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the Flesh.**' —What St. Paul means is that the best way to drive **bad** thoughts, etc., out of our hearts is to put **good** ones in their place. Put kind thoughts in your hearts, and there will be no room for cross ones. Be always loving, and you will have no time to be selfish, etc. If a room is full of bad air, how do you get rid of it? By opening the window, and letting the fresh air in. So open your heart to all that is good, and it will expel what is bad. And one thing especially. **Take Jesus into your hearts.** If you have Jesus in your hearts you cannot help walking in the Spirit, and showing the fruits of the Spirit, because He will teach you what to do, and make you like Himself. Say—

'Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,
In Thy gracious hands I am;
Make me, Saviour, what Thou art;
Live Thyself within my heart.'

'I shall then show forth Thy praise,
Serve Thee all my happy days;
Then the world shall always see
Christ, the Holy Child, in me.'

'**I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me**' (Gal. ii. 20).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

This is a difficult lesson for children, and it has been thought better to dwell on the historical introduction longer than usual, in order to try to arouse interest in what is to follow. An excellent opportunity is thus also afforded of showing how we may supplement the narrative in the Acts by references in St. Paul's letters. The only passages in the Acts bearing on the Galatian visits are Acts xvi. 6; xviii. 23. In the general treatment of the subject, the writer is indebted for some hints to Sermons ix.-xi., in the third series of the Rev. J. Vaughan's *Sermons to Children*.

XXXIII.—THE DIVINE ARMOUR

Ephes. vi. 10-18

'Put on the whole armour of God' (Ephes. vi. 11)

Introductory.—All remember what happened to St. Paul when he went to Rome to be tried,—how he was allowed to live for two years in his own house, but not alone, '*with a soldier that kept him.*' Day and night a soldier by his side, fastened to him by a chain. How much then St. Paul must have thought about soldiers, would hear of their battles, see their wounds, examine their armour! and so when he writes a letter to the Ephesians from Rome, how natural to describe the armour they must put on if they wish to conquer in great battle which they have to fight! Let us hear what he says.

Read in class Ephes. vi. 10-18.

Sketch of Lesson.—These verses tell us of the Christian's armour—the armour which God gives to every one who is trying to be '*a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*' But before we think more of it, must think of

I. **Our Enemies.**—How many boys think, 'I would like to be a soldier'! girls even sometimes wish that they were men, and could go and fight. Hear to-day of a battle all can fight—battle against sin. Think about it. Who are our enemies? They are **within** us. When you are trying to do right, do you never feel something inside you tempting you to wrong? That makes a struggle; St. Paul himself felt it—two laws '*warring*' within him (Rom. vii. 23). [Illustrate in detail. In morning one voice says, 'Time to get up'; the other, 'Lie still a little.' Or when something given to us, one voice, 'Keep all for yourself'; the other, 'Give some to your little brother.'] Then our enemies are **around** us—bad words, bad books, bad companions; we have to fight against them all. We need to be brave if we are going to win. No one likes to be called a coward, but we are cowards if we are afraid to do what is right, though others laugh at us. [Illustrate. Timid Arthur saying his prayers in the dormitory in *Tom Brown's School Days* was the real hero, and not big, strong Tom Brown.] Once more one great enemy—**the Devil.** He is going about trying to tempt us, as he tempted Adam and Eve. (Compare Hymn 427.) St. Peter calls him '*a roaring lion*' (1 Pet. v. 8). If you knew there was a real lion always watching to catch you, how careful you would be! You would do like the people in countries where lions are, and not go out without arms to **defend** yourselves. Hear now how we can defend ourselves against all our enemies—what armour we are to put on.

II. **Our Armour.**—We saw what made St. Paul think of 'the divine armour.' Look at the Roman soldier's armour; it will help us to understand about our own.

1. He had the '*loins girt about with truth.*' A girdle binds round all, keeps everything in its place. So **truth** must encircle all we say and do. You know what a person means when he says, 'You are sincere, to be depended upon, trusted,'—that is to have the girdle of truth.

2. '*The breastplate of righteousness.*' Breastplate protects the heart. To defend ourselves, must keep our **hearts** right, not let evil thoughts, etc., enter into them. Solomon says heart is to be kept '*above all keeping; for out of it are the issues of life*' (Prov. iv. 23, margin). If our hearts are not guarded, it is like letting an enemy into most holy and precious place of all.

3. '*Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*' The soldier must be always **ready** to defend himself against sudden attacks, prepared to march at any moment. [Illustrate. Gideon attacked the Midianites when unprepared (Judges vii.)]

4. We now come to something very important—'*the shield of faith.*' The shield covers whole body; all '*fiery darts*' turned back. **God** is our shield (Ps. xxxiii. 20; lxxxiv. 11, etc.) Trust in Him keeps us from all harm. How foolish if a man threw away his shield before going into battle! That like us if we think we can defend ourselves without God's help against all danger and evil.

5. '*The helmet of salvation.*' No use to protect the body if we leave the head uncovered. But God has provided a helmet for us, to keep us quite safe. Our helmet is **Jesus Christ**; He came to **save** us, to make us whole and strong. So in another letter St. Paul says first '*put on the armour of light,*' and then a very little after, '*put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ*' (Rom. xiii. 12, 14). Jesus Himself is the best armour, as He is the best Captain.

6. We have been hearing about **armour** to **defend** us; hear now of **weapons** to **attack** our foes—'*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*' When Jesus was tempted by the devil He drove him away with words from Scripture (Matt. iv. 1-11). Good for us to study our **Bibles**, to learn texts and verses; they will teach us what to say and how to act when we are tempted [Illustrate from the Beatitudes. For example: some one tempts you to quarrel, but you remember, '*Blessed are the peacemakers,*' and you refuse to quarrel, try to make your enemy your friend. Or take a Bible story: David conquering Saul by kindness (1 Sam. xxiv.)]

7. One other great weapon—'*praying always.*' Not enough to watch and to fight, we must also pray. [Illustrate. Israel and Amalek, Exod. xvii. 8-16. Compare Matt. xxvi. 41.] If we try to fight battle **alone**, sure to be defeated; but **God** can make us strong over all our enemies. David, the shepherd boy, conquered the great giant Goliath '*in the name of the Lord of Hosts*' (1 Sam. xvii. 45). With God's help we too can conquer all the giants that attack us—Giants Idleness, Selfishness, Disobedience, etc. [Just previous to Bannockburn, whole Scottish army fell on their knees in prayer. The English king observing this, cried out, 'They yield, they yield! see, they are imploring mercy!'—'Yes,' answered one of his generals, 'they are imploring mercy, but not from us; on this field they will conquer or die.']

We have heard now about our enemies and our armour; but we need one thing more if we are to '*fight the good fight of faith.*' We need

III. **Our Captain.**—Without a captain soldiers would never conquer, would not know what to do. We have already heard who is our Captain—**Jesus Christ.** [Recall the appearance to Joshua (Josh. v. 13-15).] That

makes us sure of victory. Remember, Jesus has **conquered** already, and His promise to all who follow Him is that they too will be '*more than conquerors*' (Rom. viii. 37). Try to think of Jesus as with you at all times, and ask Him to make you **strong**. [Wellington once gave a young officer a difficult task to do. 'Give me but one grasp of your conquering right hand,' the officer said, 'and I'll do it.' Wellington did so in the presence of the soldiers: the officer accomplished the task.] What do you sing at the end of every verse of your soldier's hymn?

'Onward! Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before.'

Are we marching to victory? Remember, there is a fight before us all. Are you fighting it bravely, trusting in God and in your Captain Jesus Christ? Or are you cowards, too lazy to try to conquer your sins, afraid of being laughed at if you always stand up for what is right? Now, while you are still children, is the time to choose; and, when you have chosen, to ask God to help you to stand firm. What a great promise He has given to us!

'**Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life**' (Rev. ii. 10).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In accordance with the subject, the bulk of this lesson has been devoted to Division II.—'Our Armour.' The teacher who finds time will, however, easily be able to enlarge on Divisions I. and III. Care must be taken to make the thought of their enemies **real** to the children by taking examples from sins of which they are themselves conscious. (Compare Hymn 425, vv. 3, 4.) Mrs. Ewing's *The Story of a Short Life* affords an excellent example of the victory gained by a child through patience and suffering. Mr. Valiant's last words may be recalled: '"Then," said he, "I am going to my Father's. . . . My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my Pilgrimage, and my Courage and Skill to him that can get it." . . . And as he went down deeper, he said, "Grave, where is thy victory?" So he passed over, and all the Trumpets sounded for him on the other side' (Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*).

XXXIV.—RECIPROCAL DUTIES

Col. iii. 18–iv. 1

'Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord' (Col. iii. 20)

Introductory.—Our last lesson was about our battle against sin. We heard what kind of armour we must put on, and who is the Captain under whom we must fight. But it is not enough for a soldier to have good armour and a good captain, unless he is **obedient** to those set over him. To keep in his own place, and do exactly what is expected of him, is the soldier's **duty.** [Recall Nelson's watchword at Trafalgar, 'England expects every man this day to do his duty.' And General Gordon's message to his sister from Khartoum just before the end: he is 'quite happy, thank God!' he tells her, and, 'like Lawrence, I have *tried* to do my duty.'] We are going to hear about our duties—duties which we all have to perform at home, just as much as soldiers in the battle-field. Let us hear what St. Paul tells us.

Read in class Col. iii. 18–iv. 1.

Sketch of Lesson.—Remember our lesson is to be about our duties. Look at word **Duty.** It means what is due, owing to any one. If I lend you sixpence, you are due me sixpence, and it is your duty to pay it back; so our duties are what we are due or owing to any one. Let us think of four different sets of people to whom we have duties.

I. **Parents.**—How much our parents have done for us! They **provide** for our daily wants, give us a home, food, clothing; send us to school that we may be taught to work for ourselves when we grow up; nurse us when we are sick. Parents too first **teach** us about God and Jesus and heaven [illustrate Timothy]; **encourage** us when we are trying to do right. [Benjamin West, the great artist, when quite young drew a picture of his baby sister asleep in her cradle. His mother so pleased that she kissed him. 'That kiss,' he used afterwards to say, 'made me an artist.' The late Bishop of Manchester, speaking once to school children, said, 'I thank God for giving me such a mother. All that I am and all that I have I owe to her.'] So too our parents' love for us makes them **correct** us when we do wrong; bad for children to be allowed to do as they please [Eli's sons]. Impossible then to realise how much we owe to parents; yet every little child may do much to pay back debt in return. How? By **love.** Nothing makes parents happier than to find children loving and good; and if loving we must also be **obedient.** [Let class repeat text.] Our parents know much better than we do what is good for us; if we are disobedient now, sure to be very sorry for it some day. What sad, uncomfortable homes when children are self-willed, rebellious! [David and Absalom; the Prodigal Son.] But when children obedient, do what they are told at once, and cheerfully, it makes all round them happy. Remember the fifth commandment. [Repeat.] **Honour** your parents by your love and obedience now when you are small; then when you grow to be men and women, how

proper to do something to make their lives happy, more comfortable. [The great Example: Jesus when a boy (Luke ii. 51, 52; compare Hymn 384, v. 3); when a man (John xix. 26, 27).] We have been thinking about duty to parents, but the fifth commandment refers to others also (Catechism, Question 64). So think now about duties to

II. **Brothers and Sisters.**—When God gives us the same parents, the same home, He wishes us to live together in love and peace—the older ones helping the younger, the younger looking up to and respecting the older (Rom. xii. 10). How much big brothers and sisters can do for the little ones! Help them with their lessons, keep them out of mischief, above all, set a good **example**. Remember younger ones almost sure to imitate you. If you are good, they will be good; if bad, they will be bad. How terrible to lead others to do what is wrong! [Elder brother warned younger brother against weak ice, but went on it himself; younger followed, fell in, and would have been drowned if elder had not been able to swim himself. Compare also Dr. Farrar's story, *Eric; or, Little by Little.*] Try not to let smallest dispeace begin at home. Can any one repeat the sixth commandment? What use telling us not to kill?' you say. Yes; but look at what Jesus says about it: '*Whosoever is angry with his brother . . .*' (Matt. v. 22). Perhaps you think **anger** a very little thing. How many angry, cross, unkind words in some homes! But we do not know what anger, if not guarded against, may lead to. The first elder brother we read about in Bible was a murderer, and he **began** by being angry (Gen. iv. 5-8).

One thing more. If God takes your brother or sister away to heaven first, how sad then to remember quarrels; how nice to think of kind, loving deeds when together on earth. [A little boy died; his sister asked leave to take his dead hand. When permitted, she said, through her tears, 'Mother, that dear hand never struck me.']

III. **Teachers.**—Do you owe them nothing? Think what would happen if you were allowed to grow up quite ignorant—never taught anything. You wouldn't be able to get on at all; no one would give you work to do—take you as a clerk, a servant, etc.; you would have no way of earning a living. How foolish, too, you would feel when companions talking about what you didn't understand, because you could not read, etc. Some children think of their teachers as hard '*taskmasters*' (like Pharaoh's, Exod. i. 11), and groan over their lessons. That quite wrong. Very discouraging too for teachers. It is not easy to teach—needs a great deal of patience and perseverance. Instead of making it harder you should try, by attention in class, preparing carefully, etc., to **please** your teachers. That the best way to pay your debt to them, and show that you are grateful for all the trouble they take with you. So with **Sunday School teachers.** When teachers see you careless, forgetting to learn your verse at home, whispering to one another in class, and not thinking at all about what they have said during the week, they begin to wonder if any use trying to teach you at all (like St. Paul, Lesson XXXII., Division I.) Some teachers so **disheartened** that they give up teaching altogether. You would not like it to be said, 'No one will teach in —— Sunday School, because the children do not care the least about what is said.' Think rather again of the great Example. [A boy was once asked where was the first Sunday School,

and who was the first scholar? He answered, '"*In the temple*," and Jesus was the first Scholar, for He sat "*in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions*"' (Luke ii. 46).] Try always to become liker to Jesus—better, holier, happier. That will encourage your teachers more than any thanks you can give them.

IV. **Servants.**—In some houses there are servants—perhaps some of you girls are hoping to be servants yourselves. When servants active, faithful, obliging, what a difference they make in whole house! how much they do for us! Surely then we owe them a great deal. What does St. Paul say to all masters (Col. iv. 1)? Some children think it does not matter how rudely they speak to servants, order them about, etc. Hope that is not true of any here. Our duty is to be kind, considerate, not giving more trouble than we can help. Never forget the **golden** rule; it refers to servants as well as to others. '*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*' (Matt. vii. 12).

Recapitulate.—These, then, are our duties to parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, servants. We often speak of '*Home, sweet home.*' All children can help to make their own homes **sweet** by love and obedience, and doing their duty in the very smallest things; and do not forget

'This is well pleasing unto the Lord.'

'With smiles of peace, and looks of love,
Light in our dwellings we may make;
Bid kind good-humour brighten there,
And still do all for Jesus' sake.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The teacher must modify this lesson according to his knowledge of the homes of his scholars. Some teachers may find a little difficulty in teaching Division III.; but anything in the shape of a personal appeal from a really earnest and devoted teacher is likely to prove very effective. The moral of Mr. Moody's story is always true. A lady asked a boy why he passed so many Sunday Schools to attend a particular one. 'There are plenty of others,' she said, 'just as good.' He said, 'They may be as good, but they are not so good for me.'—'Why not?' she asked. 'Because they love a fellow over there,' he answered. Love won him.

XXXV.—ASLEEP IN JESUS

1 Thess. iv. 13-18

'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him' (1 Thess. iv. 14)

Introductory.—In our lessons on Acts of Apostles we heard about St. Paul's visit to Thessalonica, and how badly he was treated there by some wicked people (**Lesson XIII.**) But still we know that St. Paul left a great many faithful friends and followers in the city, and it would make him very glad when Timothy, whom he had sent to inquire, came to him at Corinth bringing good tidings of their faith and love, and saying how anxious they were to see him again (1 Thess. iii. 6). St. Paul would have liked very much to go and visit them for himself, but quite impossible,—perhaps too ill (1 Thess. ii. 18; compare 2 Cor. xii. 7); then remember how busy he always was,—had '*the care of all the churches*' (2 Cor. xi. 28). So he did the next best thing,—wrote a **letter**, full of comfort and encouragement, to the Thessalonians. They needed to be cheered; some were being persecuted for Christ's sake, others very sad because their friends had died before Christ came a second time, and they thought that they would never see them again. We are going to hear to-day what St. Paul wrote to **comfort** these last.

Read in class 1 Thess. iv. 13-18.

Sketch of Lesson.—Remember what we heard before. Some Christians at Thessalonica were very sad and hopeless about their dead friends—thought that for them death was the end of all things. But St. Paul in these verses bids them not be afraid of death; it was only like a sleep, and their friends would wake again when Jesus came. And he said they might know that for certain. How? What does our text say? [Let class repeat text.] Because Jesus had risen from the dead, all who believed in Him would rise too, and go to be with Him for ever. What comfort that for the Thessalonians! **And for us!** Perhaps some children here who know what it is to have lost a parent, a brother, a friend, are wondering, 'Shall we ever see them again?' St. Paul's message as much for these children as for the Thessalonians. Let us think about it for a little longer. And the first lesson we learn is—

I. **Death is a Sleep.**—No one is afraid of sleep. How nice to look at your little baby sister lying sleeping in her cradle! And when tired yourselves, how glad to go to bed, and fall asleep, knowing you will awake fresh and bright in the morning! So, says St. Paul, to those who love Jesus death is the sleep from which they awake to a new, bright day—only this time to a day which has no night. Jesus Himself spoke of **death** as **sleep.** Who remembers the story? A little girl, only twelve years old, lying dead on a bed; many people weeping and wailing in the room; Jesus coming in and rebuking them—'*The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth*'—then proving it—how? [Mark v. 22-43. Let the children as far as possible supply the particulars in telling the story.] Then again all know what Jesus said about

Lazarus when he was dead, '*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but . . .*' (John xi. 11). Or one more Bible story. A crowd of angry men hurling stones at a man kneeling in their midst. What a terrible death,—his body all bruised and sore, but still he prayed for those stoning him [like Whom? (Luke xxiii. 34)], then '*fell asleep.*' All pain, suffering, sorrow over for him on earth. What a glad awaking in heaven (Acts vii. 54-60)! Learn then **not to fear** death. Only sin can make it terrible. But Jesus died to take away sin, and those who trust in Him can say what David said in your Psalm (Ps. xxiii. 4-6). [Illustrate. Once a minister went in to comfort a mother sitting sorrowing beside her dying child. Suddenly the child sang out with clear but feeble voice—

'There is a happy land,
Far, far away.'

'Hear,' said the minister, 'your child is on the way to heaven.' And then came from the dying child's lips—

'Where saints in glory stand,
Bright, bright as day.']

If all this is true, then we learn a second lesson—

II. **We must not sorrow too much for those who are dead.**—St. Paul does not say we are not to sorrow at all. We cannot lose a dear friend and not be sad. Jesus Himself '*wept*' at the grave of Lazarus (John xi. 35). But St. Paul says we are not to sorrow '*even as others which have no hope.*' Think of a poor heathen father or mother who has never heard about Jesus or heaven. How sad when child dies—'*no hope*' of ever seeing him again. But for us how different! When all go to bed in the evening, look forward to meeting again in the morning. So our text tells us, when Christ's children die and are laid in the grave, they are only **separated** from us for a little while. [Illustrate. Dr. Tait, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, when his children died, had a picture of them painted with these words underneath—

'And with the morn those angel-faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.']

Jesus, when He comes again, will **call** the dead (v. 16; compare Mark v. 41; Luke vii. 14; John xi. 43), just as your brother calls you in the morning; and they shall awake, '*and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*' There will be no more sorrow, no more parting in heaven. But all who have loved Jesus on earth will meet at last in one home above. Do you remember a hymn of which the chorus is all '**joyful**'? Why? Because—

'All who love the Lord below,
When they die, to heaven will go,
And sing with saints above.

'Little children will be there,
Who have sought the Lord by prayer
From every Sabbath School.

'Teachers, too, shall meet above;
Pastors, parents, whom we love,
Shall meet to part no more.'

What a **happy** meeting that will be! We all would like to be there; but if so, we must remember this last lesson—

III. **We must try to love and serve Jesus now.**—It is not to every one that all those promises are given; but to those who fall '*asleep in Jesus.*' The 'home' and the 'crown' for little children 'above the bright blue sky' are for those 'who love the blessed Saviour' on earth. Children who do not love Jesus here cannot expect to go and live with Him in heaven. They would **not be happy** even if He asked them. We are only happy with those we love and whom we try to please. Who likes to see mother or teacher when he has been doing anything wrong? How sad if Jesus were to come, and find us **not ready** for Him, like foolish virgins (Matt. xxv. 1-13), or the faithless servant (Matt. xxv. 24-30)! We do not know **when** Jesus will come, but every day, every hour brings His coming nearer. The great thing is to be **always** ready. If we ask Jesus He will take away all our sins, and make us new and obedient children—such children as He loves, and as love Him. [Illustrate. 'In 1629 Charles I.'s little daughter Anne was also buried there (the Innocents' Corner of Westminster Abbey), who on her deathbed, at four years old, was not able to say her long prayer (meaning the Lord's Prayer), but said she would say her short one, "Lighten mine eyes, Lord, lest I sleep the sleep of death." And so the little lamb gave up the ghost.'] Do not forget that the children who stand 'around the throne of God in heaven' are those 'whose sins are all through Christ forgiven.'

'On earth they sought the Saviour's grace,
On earth they loved His name;
And now they see His blessed face,
And stand before the Lamb.'

'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. xix. 14).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The attempt has been made as usual in the introductory paragraph to give the historical setting of the lesson. It can easily be omitted, if thought desirable; but no effort should be spared here, as always, to let the scholars understand that they have before them a real letter written to real persons. The substance of the lesson is of the greatest importance, and children should in every way be encouraged to think of the dead as not really dead, but living. Wordsworth's poem, 'We are Seven,' will occur to many teachers, and for their own guidance they may be glad to have R. Browning's hopeful words recalled: 'Death, death! It is this harping on death that I despise so much. Without death, which is our crapelike, churchyardy word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. . . . For myself I deny death as the end of everything. Never say of me that I am dead.' He

'Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.'

XXXVI.—EXHORTATIONS TO UNWORLDLINESS

1 Tim. vi. 1-19; Phil. iv. 6, 7; 1 Pet. v. 7; 1 John ii. 15-17

'The living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy' (1 Tim. vi. 17)

Introductory.—When St. Paul first visited Lystra (Acts xiv.) there was a young man there called Timothy. He lived with his good mother and grandmother, and they had taught him, ever since he was very young, to know and love '*the Holy Scriptures*' (2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15). He would likely hear St. Paul preaching, and perhaps was one of the crowd looking on, unable to do anything when the wicked Jews stoned the Apostle (Acts xiv. 19). But even if so, that did not frighten Timothy: he wished to be a missionary too. And so when St. Paul and Silas came back again to Lystra on another missionary journey and asked Timothy to go with them, he went at once (Acts xvi. 1-3), and almost always afterwards was with St. Paul as his faithful friend and companion. St. Paul trusted Timothy so much, that when he himself was taken to Rome a second time to be tried, he left Timothy behind at Ephesus to teach and comfort the Christians there. And as he knew that that would be difficult work for Timothy, he wrote him two beautiful letters from Rome to encourage him, and to remind him of what he ought to teach to others. How kind St. Paul was! Think of him, the old man, a prisoner at Rome, writing to his young friend, his '*dearly beloved son*' Timothy, at Ephesus. Our lesson to-day is from the first of his letters. Let us hear what St. Paul wrote.

Read in class 1 Tim. vi. 1-19.

Sketch of Lesson.—There are many truths in these verses which it is as important for us to know as it was for Timothy and the Ephesians. Let us think of four, all very simple, and which have to do with our every-day life. For remember religion has to do with our conduct **every day**, and not only on Sundays. It teaches us what we should be always thinking and doing. Here then is our first lesson—

I. **Be contented.**—Read again vv. 6-8. All know what to be contented means: it is to be **satisfied** with where we are and what we have. Some children are never contented—always thinking, 'I wish that I was rich, or had fine clothes, or had no lessons to learn.' Do you know any children like these? Perhaps some here—in this class. If so, think how **foolish** all that grumbling is! Grumbling does not make things any better, only makes yourselves and all near you uncomfortable. Discontented people cannot be **happy**. If they get what they first wish for—begin to want more. The great thing to remember is that **God knows** what is best for us far better than we know ourselves. He has given us our homes and all that we have, and will take care of us if we trust in Him. He has got duties for us all to do (compare **Lesson XXXIV.**), and we can do them just as well if we are poor and weak as if rich and strong. [Illustrate by fable of a king coming into his garden and finding all the trees complaining — the oak because it did not bear beautiful flowers, the rosebud because it had no fruit, the vine because it could not stand by itself. But the little pansy was looking very bright and

cheerful. 'Why?' asked the king. 'I thought,' it said, 'that you planted me here, because you wanted me to be a nice good pansy, and so I made up my mind that I would try to be the best little pansy in all the garden.' Compare Hymn 407.]

'Godliness with contentment is great gain.'

II. **Be thankful.**—How much we all have to be thankful for! [Let class repeat text.] Notice it is '*all things*' which God gives; the world in which we live—the sky, the earth, life itself, our homes, parents, friends, food, clothing—all that we have and enjoy comes to us from God. (Compare Gen. i., also Hymn 410.) Do we never forget this? Take a simple example—'*our daily bread.*' If I asked you who gave it you, what would you answer? Your mother, or the baker, or the miller who ground the corn, or the farmer who sowed the seed; and then perhaps last of all, if I still asked you—**God.** You would put God last instead of first, if you did not **forget** Him altogether. But how wrong, how ungrateful that would be! What would you think of a person who was always coming and asking for something and getting it, and never saying 'Thank you'? Yet that is what we do when we pray to God every day—'*Give us this day our daily bread*'—and do not thank Him when He answers our prayer. God likes to see a grateful, loving spirit; and it grieves Him when His children forget Him.

Think how **different** your lot might have been. Some children have no homes, no friends; many children have no one to tell them about Jesus and His love or about Heaven. How **thankful** then we should be to God for all that He has given us! Even in **trouble** we can all find something to be thankful for. [Compare **Lesson XXXI.** and this story—A poor woman with two children had no bed to lie on, scarcely any clothes to cover them. In depth of winter they were nearly frozen with cold, and the woman took a cellar door, behind which all crouched trying to keep themselves warm. As the woman was bewailing their hard lot, one of the children whispered, 'Mother, what do those dear children do who have no cellar door to put up in front of them?']

'. . . the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.'

III. **Be trustful.**—If God has taken such good care of us in the past, we may safely trust Him for the future. Once when Jesus was preaching there were among His hearers some very **anxious** people who did not know where they were to get food and clothing. What did Jesus do? He pointed to the birds in the air and said, '*Your Heavenly Father feedeth them*'; and then to the lilies growing at His feet and said, '*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow*: if God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, shall He not *much more* feed and clothe His children?' So too in other ways. Perhaps some one here is already beginning to wonder, 'What shall I do when I become a man or woman? How shall I earn a living?' Right that you should think about these things; but wrong to be **over-anxious**: great thing again is to **trust God** and to ask Him to guide you; He will show you what to do. Remember, God is always near you, watching over you if ever you are sick, or in sorrow, or in danger. Pray, '*Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe*,' for, '*like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him*' (Ps. cxix. 117; ciii. 13). [Illustrate—Father with his little boy climbing a dangerous rock; mother called from below to the boy,

'Have you fast hold of your father?' 'No, mother,' he called back in a voice of perfect trust, 'but he has fast hold of me.']

'Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.'

IV. **Be rich in good Works.**—Here a kind of riches all can have. All cannot be rich in this world's goods—in fine houses, clothes, etc.—but all can be rich '*in good works.*' And these are the best kind of riches, for they **last.** When a rich man dies, he cannot take his houses, his carriages, etc., with him to another world. [Illustrate—Parable of the rich fool (Luke xii. 16-21). Or, A rich old man took a friend to see his riches. 'That house, that farm, these jewels,' he said, 'are all mine.' 'Well,' said his friend, 'you've all this on earth; but what have you got up there in heaven?' 'Up where?' said the old man. 'Up in heaven? Well, I'm afraid I haven't got much up there.' 'Ah!' said his friend, 'but you've got to die, to leave this world; what will you take with you of all these things?' The old man burst into tears: he had no hope for the future.] But kind, and gentle, and loving thoughts and words and deeds **do not die.** The child whose heart and life are full of them is laying up '*treasure in heaven.*' (Compare 1 John ii. 15-17.) We do not know how soon God may call us away from this earth. But we know that time is **passing away** very quickly. A whole week of our lives is gone, since last we met in Sunday School. Did you lay up any '*treasure*' last week? How many '*good works*' have you done to-day? Do not put off. Begin at once. 'Scatter seeds of kindness' wherever you are, and you shall have a rich harvest some day. Can any one tell me who was the richest king we read about in the Old Testament? Solomon. Yes; but he tells us of something '*more precious than rubies*'—**Wisdom.**

'For she has treasures greater far
Than east or west unfold;
And her rewards more precious are
Than all their stores of gold.

. . . . .

'According as her labours rise,
So her rewards increase;
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.'

'Laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come.'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

No direct mention is made in the sketch of 'Unworldliness,' but the four lessons to be taught are all illustrations of the unworldly spirit, and such as children can easily understand. Care must be taken, as in **Lesson XXXIV.**, to adapt the lessons to the children's particular lot and surroundings. The introductory remarks can be dispensed with, if time does not permit.

XXXVII.—WARNINGS AGAINST BACKSLIDING AND LUKEWARMNESS IN RELIGION

Heb. iii. 7-14; iv. 11-16; vi. 11, 12; x. 23-29, 35-39; Rev. iii. 1-6, 14-22

'Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts' (Heb. iii. 7, 8)

Introductory.—Look at the name given to those to whom the letter from which our lesson to-day is taken was addressed—**Hebrews.** They were Jews long ago who had heard about Jesus, and become His disciples, but who found it very hard to be good Christians; for they were laughed at and persecuted by their old friends who did not believe in Jesus (x. 32-34); and then some of them were disappointed because Jesus did not come again so quickly as they had expected to take them to live with Him in heaven (x. 36, 37). So there was a danger that these Jewish Christians or Hebrews would themselves forget Jesus, and not stand firm—what in the title of our lesson is called **backsliding**; or at any rate would not serve Jesus so heartily and joyfully as once they had done—what is called **lukewarmness.** Now this letter was written to encourage the Hebrews, and prevent them from falling into these sins.

Read in class Heb. iii. 7-14; x. 23-29, 35-39.

Sketch of Lesson.—We have heard about the people to whom these words were first written; but are there no people, no children like them still? We too have heard about Jesus, and are trying to be His disciples; and do not we too often find it hard to stand firm, and do always what is right? How many temptations surround us which, if not guarded against, will '*harden*' our hearts, and make us backsliders and lukewarm like the Hebrews! Let us think about these temptations in a way easy for all to remember. There is a curious verse in the Old Testament which perhaps you have never heard, '*Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes*' (Song of Solomon ii. 15). That verse may mean many things; but for us, this: you children are the vines, your hearts are the grapes, '*tender*' because you are still young and your hearts are soft. And then the foxes, what are they? Sins, bad habits which '*spoil*' your hearts. How many foxes there are! Disobedience, Untruthfulness, Pride, Vanity, and many more. But to-day we are only going to think of four '*little foxes*,' so little that perhaps you think they do not matter much, but which will do a great deal of mischief if we do not drive them away. Let me tell you about them in words from a little poem written for children.

I. The first fox—

'Among my tender vines I spy
A little fox named "**By and by.**"'

How many hearts that little fox spoils! Children mean to be good, loving, obedient by and by—that is to-morrow, or next day, or when they are grown up, instead of now—**to-day.** [Let children repeat the text.

Illustrate from history of Felix, Acts xxiv. 25.] Suppose you have to sit down to your lessons, or to run a message for your mother, or have something hard, disagreeable to do—for example, confess that you have been disobedient—then you all know how apt you are to **put off** instead of doing what you ought **at once**. [Illustrate. The late young Prince Napoleon, when told to do anything, used so often to ask for ten minutes' delay, that his mother called him 'Mr. Ten Minutes.' In the Zulu war he went with some soldiers to examine a particular spot. Their work done, they should have returned at once, but the Prince asked for the usual delay. During these ten minutes the Zulus came upon them, threw their spears, and Prince Napoleon fell dead.] You cannot be too prompt. Delay only makes your duty harder. Follow the example of Abraham, who, when God called him to offer up Isaac his son, '*rose up early in the morning*' (Gen. xxii. 3). He was afraid to wait in case his courage failed him. Having nothing to do with fox 'By and by.'

'Then set upon him quick, I say,
The swift young hunter "**Right away.**"'

II. The second fox—

'"**No use in trying,**" lags and whines
This fox among my tender vines.'

'It's no use trying to be good, because I can't; no use trying to learn this verse, because it's so difficult.' Have you ever heard children saying anything like that? If so, how foolish they are! The only way is to **go on trying** with all their might, and they are sure to succeed.

This is true of our **faults**. Here is a boy with a bad temper. The first time he tries he does not conquer it, but the second time it is easier, the third time easier still, until at last he quite gains the victory. It is true of our **virtues**. We should always be trying to be better. That needs perseverance, watching always against sin, praying always for more strength. Remember, everything can be done by trying. [Illustrate. Columbus discovering America, though at first every one laughed at him, and no one would help. Or William Carey, who from being a shoemaker became the first of modern missionaries, learned new languages in India, translated the New Testament into them, and so brought knowledge of Jesus to great numbers of people.] So if ever this fox comes near you—

'Then drive him low, and drive him high,
With this good hunter, named "**I'll try.**"'

III. The third fox—

'Among the vines in my small lot
Creeps in the young fox "**I forgot.**"'

No need to explain much about this fox. When you wake in the morning, do you never make up your minds to be unselfish and loving all day, or to overcome some particular fault which you have been warned against? Or here in the Sunday School do you never think, How nice to be always attentive, obedient children! and so you make a very **good start**; but this little fox creeps in, and you **forget**. Sometimes children, when they have done wrong, think that it is quite enough **excuse** to say that they forgot.

Is it? Suppose your mother forgot to give you your breakfast some morning, or all your friends forgot that it was your birthday, and sent you no presents, what would you say then? Would you say forgetting was a good excuse? You never forget what pleases you—that you are going to have a school holiday. Why should you forget about doing right? That is the most important thing of all to remember. Who can tell me what hunter we need here?

'Then hunt him out and to his den
With "**I will not forget again.**"'

IV. The fourth fox—

'A little fox is hidden there
Among my vines, named "**I don't care.**"'

This the worst fox of all. It is bad when children put off, or don't try, or forget; but when children **don't care**, that makes their parents and teachers very sad and hopeless about them. Have you ever seen a little boy or girl who has done something wrong, and who, instead of looking sorry, has a black cross face? If you have, fox 'I don't care' has got at that child's heart, and must be driven away. What is the first thing every one ought to do when they have sinned? They ought to be **sorry**, and ask God's forgiveness and His help to keep them from sinning again. Jesus once told a beautiful story about a young man who left his father's house and wandered away '*into a far country*,' and there lived a very wicked life. 'I don't care' must often have been seen on his face in these days; but at length he '*came to himself*,' was sorry, and returned, saying, '*Father, I have sinned . . .*' (Luke xv. 11-32). Remember him, and how much he suffered, and made others suffer, when you are tempted; and if you do sin, show your sorrow at once by coming to God, your Father in heaven, to be forgiven. The very moment fox 'I don't care' tries to spoil your vines—

'Then let "**I'm sorry,**" hunter true,
Chase him afar from vines and you.'

Do not then forget these four foxes, and the four hunters to drive them away. And one thing more: do not forget what we have heard so often, that **Jesus** is on our side to help us. When He was on earth He knew what it was to be tempted; and now that He is in heaven, He promises to be with His children to strengthen and protect them, and keep them from falling.

'**Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need**' (Heb. iv. 16).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The subject of this lesson is of such a nature that it is not easy to teach it to young children without the aid of some such objective figure as is suggested in the sketch. Teachers, however, who prefer to do so, can drop the figure altogether and refer simply to the four sins here represented by the foxes, as leading to backsliding and lukewarmness. In that case the historical introduction can be longer dwelt on, and reference to the Hebrews kept up throughout the lesson.

XXXVIII.—PRACTICAL RELIGION

Jas. i. 13-15, 22-27; ii. 14-17; iii. 1-12; v. 16-20; 1 Pet. ii. 19-23

'But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves' (Jas. i. 22)

Introductory.—In the New Testament there are twenty-one letters, thirteen written by St. Paul, one—the letter to the Hebrews—perhaps by Apollos, one by St. James, two by St. Peter, three by St. John, and one by St. Jude. [Let children turn up Bible index and follow these particulars.] Our lesson to-day is from the letter written by St. James—a very interesting letter, because St. James was '*the Lord's brother*' (Gal. i. 19; Matt. xiii. 55). We know that, while Jesus was alive, James did not believe in Him (John vii. 5), but after His death and resurrection he became His faithful disciple (1 Cor. xv. 7). The other disciples at Jerusalem trusted him so much that, when the Apostles were scattered everywhere preaching, they made James the chief head or ruler of their Church. It was then that he wrote this letter to rebuke the sins he saw on all sides, and especially one sin we are going to think about to-day. St. James heard many people calling '*Lord, Lord*,' pretending that Jesus was their Master, and that they were His disciples, but still **not doing** the things which Jesus said. And he wished to show them how wrong that was; and that, if they were to be really Jesus' disciples, they must be '*doers of the word, and not hearers only*.'

Read in class Jas. i. 22-27; ii. 14-17; v. 16-20.

Sketch of Lesson.—Remember what we learnt about this letter. It is the letter of a minister to his congregation, or of a teacher to his scholars—so very important for all Sunday School scholars. Try and think of it as if it were written directly to you; for God intends this message for the children of this Sunday School as much as for the people at Jerusalem, more than 1800 years ago. Our text then may tell us of three kinds of scholars who are in every Sunday School.

I. **Neither Hearers nor Doers.**—Perhaps you think, 'That cannot mean any of us; we all hear, all do lessons. It must mean children in the streets, who never go to Sunday School, or heathen children who have no schools or teachers.' Yes, but it also means some of you—very few, I hope, but still some, I am afraid, **in this school.** Who, then? Children who do not prepare their lessons at home, do not listen in school, but fidget about, learn nothing, disturb others, and prevent them learning. And who, when they leave school, go home and are cross, disobliging, selfish, so that no one would ever think that they had been at Sunday School at all. If any like those here, perhaps **putting off** listening to Jesus' words or trying to be like Jesus till they are older, let them remember one thing—it will be far more difficult then. Now when young, hearts soft and tender, not spoiled by the foxes (**Lesson XXXVII.**), is the time to hear and obey.

II. **Hearers only.**—How many of these? Children who read their Bible verses in the morning, listen to the sermon in church and the lesson

in Sunday School, and who, if asked, could tell all about them; but that is all, they hear only. Perhaps they have allowed their hearts to grow **hard** like the path through the corn-field in Jesus' parable, so that the seed of the word cannot get in. [Illustrate. Pharaoh.] Or they are **faint-hearted**, like the stony ground, listen eagerly, make many good resolutions, rush off home from school to show how gentle and loving they are going to be, but have '**not root**' in themselves, and, when first difficulty or temptation comes, forget and fall away. [Illustrate. Herod Antipas (Mark vi. 20 and 26, 27); Pliable, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*.] Or once more, they are **half-hearted.** They have heard and taken God's word into their hearts, but have taken other things as well—selfish thoughts, bad words, unkind deeds, etc., and these last choke the good seed. [Illustrate. Judas Iscariot, who listened to Jesus and followed Him, but did not part with his old sins at the same time—tried to serve two masters.] All these are '**hearers only.**' And notice, this can do them **no good.** Suppose you were ill and heard only what the doctor said would make you better, would that cure you? No; you must obey the doctor—take the medicine which he orders. So it will do us no good to hear only God's Word, unless we receive it, and try to do what God says.

III. **Hearers and Doers.**—Think of the parable again—'*He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit.*' [Illustrate. Nathanael coming to Jesus with a heart willing and prepared to receive (John i. 46-51).] That the true Sunday School scholar, who listens to the lesson and tries to remember it and do what it says. Think what good children you ought to be. How many Sunday School lessons you have heard. But have you tried to **practise** what you heard? **Doing right**; that the real sign of Christ's children, and not merely listening attentively, or singing hymns, or repeating verses. [Illustrate. A girl in the Sandwich Islands had a class of little children. She wished to know which of them had accepted Christianity, so asked each one, 'Do you love your enemies?' If child answered 'Yes,' the teacher said, 'Then you are a Christian; stand here.' If 'No'—'Then you are a heathen; stand on the other side.'] Our religion, if it is real and true, should show itself in **all** that we think and say and do, at all times and in all places, and not only on Sundays and in Sunday School. [An old Sunday School teacher on his death-bed said to David Livingstone, 'Now, lad, make religion the every-day business of your life, and not a thing of fits and starts; for, if you don't, temptations and other things will get the better of you.']

PRACTICAL LESSONS

All may learn three things:—

1. **To be attentive.**—Nothing discourages a teacher so much as when he sees children careless, thinking about other things. He cannot hope to help them then. And what will God think of children who do not **listen** to His message? If the Queen were to send you a message, how eagerly you would listen to every word of it! How much more attentive you should be when a message comes to you from God, telling how you may be His children here, and go to live with Him for ever in heaven!

2. **To be obedient.**—When you have heard God's message, obey it. Begin by giving your hearts to God, and then all His other commandments will be easy. Do not forget that God wishes you to seek Him **now** while you are still young. [Prov. viii. 17 ; Eccles. xii. 1. And, A teacher once asked her class how soon a child should give her heart to God. One little girl said, 'When thirteen years old'; another 'ten'; another 'six.' The last child said, 'Just as soon as we know who God is.']

3. **To do good.**—It is not enough to hear and obey God's Word for ourselves, we must try also to do something for others. All can be **useful**, show their love to God by kind and loving deeds. Do not wait for great opportunities. Use the **little** opportunities which come to us every day of our lives. ['Try before next Sunday to be useful in some way or other,' a teacher said to his class. 'Agreed!' replied the boys. 'What have you done?' he asked each when they met again. 'I,' said one, 'carried a pail of water every morning for my mother.' 'And I,' said another, 'read a chapter of the Bible to a poor old woman who could not see.' 'And I,' said a third, 'held a gentleman's horse, and got twopence, which I put in the missionary box.' All by trying found some little good thing they could do.]

'Hark! it is the Saviour calling,
"Little children, follow Me!"
Jesus, keep our feet from falling,
Teach us all to follow Thee.

'Soon we part—it may be never,
Never here to meet again ;
O, to meet in heaven for ever!
O, the crown of life to gain!'

HINTS TO TEACHERS

The Sunday School motto, '*Take fast hold of instruction ; let her not go : keep her ; for she is thy life*' (Prov. iv. 13), is practically the subject of this lesson, and teachers ought to find no difficulty in interesting their scholars in it. If the passages Jas. iii. 1-12 ; 1 Pet. ii. 19-23 are referred to, occasion might be taken to plead with the children to be careful against sins of the tongue, and especially not to speak back when corrected. It cannot be too distinctly explained to the children what they come to the Sunday School for ; and that attendance carries with it certain responsibilities.

XXXIX.—OUR ASCENDED LORD

Rev. i. 4-6, 10-18; v. 6-14; vii. 9-17; xiv. 1-3; xix. 11-16

'I am alive for evermore' (Rev. i. 18)

Introductory.—Our lesson to-day is taken from 'The **Revelation** of St. John.' What is revelation? A revealing, a drawing back a veil. St. John **reveals** to us what, when an old man, he was permitted to see. Much that he reveals described under **figures**, not to be understood literally, but all have a meaning.

Let us hear what St. John has to tell us about **Jesus Christ**, and about **heaven**, where Jesus is. *Read in class* Rev. i. 4-6, 10-18; vii. 9-17.

Sketch of Lesson.—**Where is Jesus Christ now?** Like to think of Him as little baby in manger at Bethlehem, or boy at Nazareth 'increasing in wisdom and stature,' or man going about teaching and healing, or of Him as He hung upon the cross or rose from the dead. But wish to know more. Where He is **to-day.** What He is doing. That we are going to learn. Think of—

I. **Jesus going up to Heaven.**—Jesus had come from heaven—had left 'His throne and His kingly crown' to live and to die for us. Now His work ended, He is going back to His Father; leads His disciples out from Jerusalem, over brook Kedron, up Olivet (had taken the same journey with them before (Luke xxii. 39), then looking forward to His *suffering*, now to His *glory*). They reach a quiet spot on the hill in sight of Bethany; often the home of Jesus during life on earth (Matt. xxi. 17; xxvi. 6). But Jesus now thinking of no *earthly* home but of *heavenly* home. What does He do before He goes? Lifts up His hands and blesses the disciples—like Israel (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16), or like minister at close of service in church. Then a cloud receives Him out of the disciples' sight (Acts i. 9). *He* goes up to the glory of heaven. *They* return for a little to the work of earth. [Compare parting of Elijah and Elisha, 'one to the prophet's reward and the other to the prophet's work' (2 Kings ii. 11).] Yet disciples not sad but very **joyful** (Luke xxiv. 52). How strange! Usually sad to say good-bye. Yes; but what did Jesus promise before He left them? 'I am with you alway'—all the days (Matt. xxviii. 20). Though they could not see Him, Jesus **still with them**—very near to them—**to us.** So we can sing—

'All His work is ended,
Joyfully we sing;
Jesus hath ascended!
Glory to our King!'

II. **Jesus in Heaven.**—1. **What He is like.** We cannot see Him; but a disciple who loved Jesus very much, who saw Him going up into heaven, was afterwards allowed to see Jesus in a vision in heaven, and has written down what He saw. Read again Rev. i. 12-16. Cannot understand it all now, but this clear: Jesus is still 'like unto a **Son of man.**' We shall be able to see Him, know Him, go to Him as the little children went to Him on earth. But perhaps you think, Will Jesus **care for us** in

heaven? He thought about children on earth, because He was made like us; but amidst the glories of heaven will He care any longer? When you think that, remember what more St. John saw (Rev. v. 6). The first time John saw Jesus, the Baptist said to him, 'Behold the Lamb of God' (John i. 29). So now the last time sees Him again, a '**slaughtered Lamb**,' but, strange to say, still living, and therefore described as standing. Even in heaven Jesus has still the marks of His sufferings. What does that teach us? The **same** Jesus who died for us now **living** in heaven—

'He who came to save us,
He who bled and died,
Now is crowned with glory,
At His Father's side.'

2. **What Jesus does in heaven**—(1) *He is reigning over us.*—The work of a king is to keep order and peace among his subjects. Jesus our **King** (Catechism, Question 26). He rules not by force but by love. He does not compel us to obey Him, but His voice within us tells us very sweetly and gently what He wishes us to do, and what will make us happy. But Jesus, as King, does something more. He 'restrains and conquers all His and our enemies.' Long ago when a king returned victorious from war, brought in his train **captives** to make a triumphal procession. Who were in Jesus' triumphal procession when He returned to heaven? 'A multitude of captives' (Ephes. iv. 8, Revised Version). His enemies and ours—pride, selfishness, disobedience, passion, death—all had been conquered. And He is helping us, His soldiers, to conquer them to-day. If we trust in Him we cannot be beaten. He is 'King of kings, and Lord of lords' (Rev. xix. 16).

'Never more to suffer,
Never more to die;
Jesus, King of Glory,
Has gone up on high!'

(2) *He is praying for us.*—When your mother separated from you, on a journey, or by illness, she does not forget you, thinks of you, prays for you. So Jesus in heaven **remembers** His children on earth. He knows all that is happening to you—your difficulties, your temptations, your sorrows. Remember, Jesus was once a little child Himself. He hears you when you pray to Him. [Illustrate. Story of Ishmael—'God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is' (Gen. xxi. 17).] He **prays for you** Himself. One prayer in church called Intercessory Prayer, because in it we pray for others. Jesus our **Intercessor**. He 'is able to save us to the uttermost' (Heb. vii. 25). [Compare Israel prevailing 'when Moses held up his hand' (Exod. xvii. 11).]

'Praying for His children
In that blessed place,
Calling them to glory,
Sending them His grace.'

(3) *He is preparing a home for us.*—If a man wishes to remove to another country or town, often goes first, sees what like it is, gets a new house, makes it all ready, then sends for his wife and children. That's what Jesus has done. He has gone to **prepare** a new **home** for His children in heaven, in their heavenly 'Father's house.' 'Many mansions' there—room

for all. When Jesus on earth, He said, 'Suffer little children . . . of such is the *kingdom of heaven*' (Matt. xix. 14). Same invitation still. He is calling you to be His children now, so that when you die you may go to Him, live with Him, be kings and queens in heaven. [Illustration. In Innocents' Corner of Westminster Abbey, Princess Mary, daughter of James I., is buried. She died at age of two years and a half. When dying kept repeating, 'I go, I go, away I go,' and again, 'I go, I go.' She was going to get a heavenly crown, not an earthly one.] There are **homes** and crowns in heaven for all 'faithful' children.

'His bright home preparing,
Faithful ones, for you;
Jesus ever liveth,
Ever loveth too.'

Recapitulate.—(1) *Regarding Jesus Himself.* He is **living**, loving, reigning. 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore' (Rev. i. 18).

(2) *Regarding His children.*—They are not **alone** now. 'I will not leave you orphans: I come unto you' (John xiv. 18, Revised Version). They shall **go to be with Jesus** for ever. 'I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also' (John xiv. 2, 3, Revised Version).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

It must be kept in mind that this is a lesson, not on the ascension of Jesus, but on 'Our Ascended Lord'—on Jesus, that is, as He lives and works in heaven. The great aim of the teacher throughout should therefore be to impress on the children's minds that Jesus, though out of sight, is **living**, and is even more truly their Saviour and Friend than if He were here on earth. In heaven He is **near all** ['like sun, high up, shines on thousands all at one time' (Stock)] and **cares for all.** It will be observed that much use has been made in the preparation of this lesson of Miss Havergal's hymn, 'Golden Harps are sounding,' which stands No. 393 in *The Scottish Hymnal*, and is usually a great favourite with children.

XL.—THE JUDGMENT DAY, AND GLORY OF THE REDEEMED

Rev. i. 7; xx. 10-15; xxi. 1-4, 9-27; xxii. 1-5

'Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him' (Rev. i. 7)

Introductory.—We have now reached last lesson of Scheme. How much we have heard of—how God created men and women good; how they disobeyed God and fell; how God still watched over and cared for them, and at length sent His own Son to die for them; how in Christ we are forgiven, and received back as God's children. And now to-day, as the end of all, we are going to hear how Christ is coming again to reign as King over all, and to welcome His children to the home He is preparing for them in heaven. Unless our Sunday lessons are helping us to be better children, Jesus' own children not in name only but in deed, and preparing us for this heavenly home, they are of very little use. So before we begin this last lesson, ask ourselves, What are we here in Sunday School for? What have we learnt? [A poor child straying one day into a Sunday School asked, '*Is this the way to heaven?*' A significant question both for teachers and scholars.] If we have learnt to know and love Jesus, to try to obey and follow Him, then how interesting to hear about the time when we shall see Him, go to live with Him, always. We are not told very much about this time, but told all we need to know. Let us learn three things.

Sketch of Lesson.—I. **Jesus is coming again.** *Read in class* Rev. i. 7.—Our last lesson about Jesus going up to heaven, reigning, praying, working in heaven; but Jesus not gone away for ever. As disciples watched Him go, what message did angels bring? '*This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner . . .*' (Acts i. 11). The **same** Jesus is coming again—do not forget that—whom we have heard so much about, whom we must often have wished to see with our own eyes. But a *difference* in His coming. The first time how did He come?

'There came a **little child** to earth
Long ago.'

But when He comes again, will come as a **King**, in '*power and great glory.*' Who shall see Him? Not a few chosen disciples only, not people of Palestine only, but **every one.** Listen. '*Every eye shall see Him.*' Are you **looking** for Jesus to come? When you desire anything very much (coming of birthday, holidays, Christmas), how eager you are!—count the days. So first disciples, always watching for Jesus' coming, used to say when they met in the street, '*The Lord is at hand,*' thought perhaps before they met again, Jesus would have come. How different often with us! We do not think about Jesus' coming so much as we ought; sometimes when we do think of it are afraid. That not right. You are glad to see your father when he returns from a journey, run to meet him, welcome him; so should be **glad** and **ready** to meet Jesus; for remember, we do not know **when** He is coming. What did He say Himself, '*Of that day and hour knoweth no man*' (Matt. xxiv. 36); and this too, '*In such an hour as ye think not*' (Matt. xxiv. 44). He will come **unexpectedly.** What is

the lesson? To be **always** ready, then does not matter when Jesus comes. [Children doing what is right, learning lessons, always glad to see master or teacher.] But how sad if He found us **unprepared**, like slothful servant or foolish virgins [or illustrate from history, 'Ethelred the Unready']. You have been praying to Jesus to come when you said, '*Thy kingdom come.*' Would you be glad if He answered prayer at once, and came **to-day?** For when He comes—

II. **Jesus is coming to judge the world.** *Read in class* Rev. xx. 11, 12.—1. **The Judge.**—All know what a judge does—finds out who are innocent and who are guilty; sets free the first, punishes the second. If no judge, no law, no policemen, how dangerous it would be! We could not live securely or peaceably. So what does hymn say about Jesus (Hymn 272)? He is—

'The Judge that comes in mercy,
The Judge that comes with might
To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right.'

Because Jesus, who is all-loving, all-powerful, is Judge, every wrong will be put right, every injustice punished.

2. **The Judged.**—Who are they? All of us, our parents, friends, teachers, every one in the world, old and young, rich and poor, 'the dead' too, 'small and great,' 'must **all** appear before the judgment-seat of Christ' (2 Cor. v. 10; Rev. xx. 12). What a great gathering that will be! [Illustrate. Inspector's visit at school; all examined; those who have done well; those who have done badly.]

3. **The Judgment.**—For what are we to be judged? The things '*written in the books*' (Rev. xx. 12). What are they? Our '**works,**' whether good or bad (2 Cor. v. 10). The important thing then not how old we are, or what we have learnt, or what money or fine clothes we have had, but what we have **done.** All **bad** deeds will be known in that day. Nothing hid from Jesus. He sees all, knows all. **No secrets** hid from Him (Luke viii. 17; Rom. ii. 16; 1 Cor. iv. 5). Perhaps you think, How then any **escape,** for all have sinned? Yes, but do not forget that same Jesus who comes as Judge came first as Saviour, to '*blot out the handwriting* that was *against us,*' '*nailing it to His cross*' (Col. ii. 14). If trusting in Him, we need not be afraid. All **good** deeds will be remembered. Once Jesus told His disciples a beautiful story (Matt. xxv. 34-40). What does that mean? Every good, kind deed done to one another, the same as if done to Jesus Himself. How happy those who will hear Jesus saying to them, '*Well done . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*' (Matt. xxv. 23). For—

III. **Jesus is coming to receive His Children to Himself.**—He is preparing a home for them in heaven. We are told very little about heaven; not easy to picture what it will be like. But this certain. It will be our '*Father's house,*' a **home.** You know what home on earth is. Home in heaven like it, only brighter, better. Hear what St. John saw.

Read in class Rev. xxi. 1-4; xxii. 1-5. 1. **What heaven is like.**—(1) There will be **no sin** in heaven. Sin makes us unhappy here. One bad child sometimes spoils happiness of whole family. Then too power of Satan in world very strong, difficult to do what is right. But in heaven

no tempter. Satan's power quite destroyed (Luke x. 18; Rev. xii. 8, 9). Easy then to follow Jesus, to be like Him; no more idleness, crossness, selfishness, disobedience. We shall **serve** Jesus *day and night*, willingly, joyfully.

(2) There will be **no parting** in heaven. How many partings on earth—partings caused by distance, by death! We do not like to be parted from those we love. How sad for a child whose mother is dead, or who has lost a baby-brother! But in heaven all who love Jesus shall **meet** again. And who more shall we see? Children from other lands—the children from India, Africa, you have been collecting for in your missionary boxes (Hymn 441). They will thank you then. Without your pennies, would not have heard of Jesus and heaven. Who more? All the good men we have been learning about—Abraham, David, the Apostles, and so on. And some one else, best of all.

(3) We shall **see Jesus.** One story in Bible children usually like best of all (Matt. xix. 13-15); so often sing, 'I wish that His hands had been placed on my head' (Hymn 396). That not possible now; Jesus not on earth but in heaven. But in heaven we shall be **with Him**, see Him, know Him, follow Him. What did He once call children? His **lambs** (John xxi. 15). Yes, and what is the promise? '*He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom*' (Isa. xl. 11).

2. **Who are invited to heaven.**—If you hear of a treat, Sunday School excursion, begin to wonder, Can I go? Who can go? All who have been attending school, learning their lessons, trying to be good scholars. So Jesus is inviting all His scholars to come to Him in heaven. He wishes **all**; there is room for all. All who wish to come. '**Whosoever will**,' that is the invitation (Rev. xxii. 17). [Illustrate. Children playing asked one another which word in Bible they liked best; *Faith*, *Love*, *Jesus*, *Hope*, *Heaven*, were the answers. Then a very young child said, 'I like *whosoever* best.'

'"Whosoever," that means all,
Even I who am so small.

. . . . .

"Whosoever will" may come,
Find a pardon and a home.']

No one who wishes to come, who asks Jesus' forgiveness for his sins, who is trying to be like Jesus, will be shut out. What did Jesus say (John vi. 37; Matt. xix. 14)?

'**Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore**' (Ps. xvi. 11).

HINTS TO TEACHERS

In teaching this lesson the teacher must keep in view two very common errors in children's minds—the first, the looking forward to Christ's second coming with dread; the second, the imagining an unreal and shadowy heaven. Every effort should be used to bring home to the children the truth that whatever heaven is, it will be '*heaven to them*,' a place where they will be perfectly happy and '*satisfied*.' Christ is their best Friend, and He knows exactly what they want. Only those children who do not love Him and do not wish to please Him cannot be happy with Him. As the lesson deals with three distinct topics, it will probably be found better not to read the passages prescribed all at once, but under the different heads as suggested in the Scheme.

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